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THE HINDU SPEAKS
ON
RELIGIOUS VALUES

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PREFACE

While the world is shrinking, the distance between the hearts is widening gradually. From the middle of this century people have been witnessing a steady decline in ethical values and are seized by an inexplicable insecurity. The only way to get rid of gloom and fear psychosis and derive some amount of solace is to depend on the grace of the Divine. People have come to feel that upholding the moral principles contained in various religions is the way to live peacefully. The role of religion hence seems paramount in the present day conflicts.

It is in this context that Mr. Kasturi Gopalan, the late Publisher of THE HINDU thought it fit in 1964 to allot some space in the newspaper each day projecting some profound religious thoughts and make people contemplate on them. The morals in the discourses by eminent scholars were carried as brief reports daily.

In this volume 500 selective lectures over a period of 33 years have been presented in 25 chapters dedicating to individual subjects and sources. We hope this will cater to the interests of all sections of society from all religions.

The services rendered by Mr. D.V. Vasudevan, Senior Reporter (Retd.) who has been associated with this Religion column since its inception, Mr. H.R. Mohan, Chief Systems Manager, Mr. M.P. Govindaraj, Library Consultant, Mr.K.R. Venkatesan, Chief Librarian, Mr. K. Rajendrababu, Deputy Chief Librarian and their colleagues in the compilation of this publication need special mention and we are thankful to them. Our thanks are also due to the Printers - MGS Printer, Chennai.

We trust this publication will enlighten the readers and the contents will be of immense benefit.

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N. RAVI
EDITOR

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The Roots of Religions 1.1

The life story of the Buddha evokes in us peace, compassion and bliss. The innumerable images of the Buddha found in all parts of the country also produce in us the triple effect of peace, compassion, and bliss. Somehow an impression has gained that Buddhism stood for atheism. We were also told by some historians that this religion was driven out of India. But the numerous Buddhist works in Sanskrit and Pali, and the Asokan edicts have revealed to us the nobility of the Awakened One (the Buddha) and have filled us with pride that this great soul was born in India. Edwin Arnold has sung the glory of the Buddha in his composition, Light of Asia. At one time, this religion had spread in Tamil Nadu also, and, as a result, we find Buddhist doctrines incorporated in several Tamil works of those days. When our hearts are filled with great respect for this religion, we may wonder why such a good religion is said to have been "driven out" of our country.

When we view events in retrospect, we find that so far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, Jainism was much more popular than Buddhism. Tamil literature abounds in works dealings with Jainism and in works by Jain authors. Jainism has also a good hold on people in Gujarat and in certain other parts of North India. Both Buddhism and Jainism proclaimed Ahimsa as their cardinal principle. Buddhists were not so uncompromisingly committed to Ahimsa as Jains, and had no scruples in eating the flesh of animals killed by others. The good support Jainism had in this country is evidenced by the numerous statues and images pertaining to that religion in several places.

Saankhya is another great and ancient religion of this land. This religion has produced more ascetics and jnanis than Buddhism or Jainism. Yet, we find neither images in honour of those ascetics and jnanis, nor an abundant literature in the form of songs and stories. However, we find more reference to Saankhya than to either Buddhism or Jainism in philosophical works.

Saiva and Vaishnava Siddhaantaas are two other forms of the Vedic religion which are current among us in the South. Vaishnava Siddhanta expressed itself through the teachings of Sri Madhwa and Sri Ramanuja. The Vaishnavism of Sri Ramanuja and the Saivism of the Saiva Siddhanta school, have each a large following in Tamil Nadu. In every Vaishnavite temple, we see installed the images of Sri Ramanuja, Nammalwar, Manavala Mamunigal, Vedanta Desika and other Alwars. Similarly, in Saivaite temples, we have the images of Appar, Sundarar, Manickavasagar, and other saints. The more important Siva temples have the images of all the sixty-three Nayanmars.

Temple inscriptions refer to gifts of landed property for conducting recitations of Vaishnava Prabandhaas and Saiva Tirumurais. Coming to Advaita, we do not find for Sri Adi Sankara, even a thousandth of the number of images that exist for Vaishnavite and Saivite saints. There are no images at all for Sri Sureswaracharya and Sri Appayya Dikshitar, two great exponents of Advaita after Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada. A high officer of the Archaeological Department once told me that if history is reconstructed only with the aid of inscription, images and other archaeological materials, there may not be any reference either to Sri Sankara or to Advaita.

It is to be noted that the founder of each religion criticised the religion that was in vogue in his time and which he sought to replace by his own religion. Buddhism criticised the Vedic religion, Jainism criticised Buddhism and so on.

Each ot these religions, including Vaishnavism of Sri Ramanuja and Saivam of Saiva Siddhaanta, has a distinct feature of its own. There are also points of differences between one religion and another. Even in a matter like idol worship, on which both Vaishnavism and Saivism agree, the former insists on, worship of the form in which God is conceived, while the latter is satisfied with the worship of a symbol, like the Linga. Christianity and Islam inveigh against idol worship, as also the Arya Samajists. While Hinduism is based on the Vedas, both Buddhism and Jainism revolted against the Vedas. Each of these religious teachers, in his time, gathered around him a huge following.

When we survey the position of religions at the present time, we find that nearly half the world's population professes Christianity and almost an equal number, Buddhism. The population not covered by these two religions follow the other religions. Several religions have risen and fallen in this world and some of them have practically disappeared. How did they rise and why did they fall, is an interesting question. Each religion, as it arose, claimed the monopoly of Truth and proclaimed that it alone was the last world in true religion. Truth is only one; there cannot be two Truths. Yet, each religious leader was able to attract to himself a very large following. Is truth to be judged from the number of people claiming allegiance to a particular religious system? If so, how did it come about that a number of religions claiming monopoly for Truth, and which in their time commanded a large following, ceased to be popular?

This gives rise to a number of other questions. Is a religion popular because it is true, or is it true because it is popular? Did people embrace a religion because it is true, or did a religion disappear because it was not true? When we ponder over these question, it becomes apparent that the endurance of a movement, or the validity of the views on

which that movement is based cannot be judged by the number of its adherents. In our own life time we have seen how Gandhism appealed to thousands of people who were prepared to fast, court imprisonment or die at his direction. There were also people who rejected Gandhiji's religious philosophy and were indifferent when he undertook his fasts. We also see the votaries of Gandhism gradually dwindling in number now.

A consideration of all these factors leads one to the inevitable conclusion that a religion does not flourish merely on account of the truth it proclaims. The key to the growth of a religion lies in the cause for its subsequent decay. In Mattavilaasa, written by King Mahendra Varma, who is responsible for the rock-cut temples at Mamallapuram and other places, there is a reference to the licentious habits of the Buddhist bhikkus of his day and to their swerving from the high code of personal conduct laid down for them. The Buddha himself, when admitting women to his order of bhikkus, foresaw the inherent danger of having both men and women in the order. The decline of Buddhism was, therefore, due to the failure of its adherents, particularly those who have to set an example for others, to rigorously adhere to the precepts of that religion. Conversely, a religion will continue to flourish if it can claim among its adherents, particularly those who, by their personal example, are charged with the propagation and preservation of that religion, men of high spiritual attainments, with a large heart and without any blemish in their character.

While the initial impetus to any religion is given by its high-souled founder, its subsequent strength and popularity depend on the fervour, devotion, discipline and purity of succeeding religious heads, and the fidelity and character of its followers. Common people are drawn to a religion by the personality of the teacher, rather than by a firm conviction of the truth it teaches. The truth or otherwise of a religion is a matter

of academic discussion, confined to the intelligent few. The reason why some religions, though they had a long history, gradually and inevitably lost their hold on the people, and eventually disappeared, can be traced to the decline in the standards of teachers. In his own life time, Gandhiji had to close down the Sabarmati Aasram, when he found that its inmates deviated from the strict rectitute he had imposed on them.

Therefore, if a religion is to be popular and powerful, its followers should observe its tenets faithfully and well. It is not in numbers or in demonstrations that the vitality of a religion lies. For that matter, Saankhya and Advaita are the least demonstrative of all religions. That in spite of the numerous and trying vicissitudes, the Vedic religion, the date of whose origin is still undetermined, survives to-day, and has such a large following, is due to the fact that in it were born, from time to time, great souls, unselfish, pure and godly, who had deep devotion and earnest fervour, and who unswervingly adhered to the ordinances of its practices. And so, if we desire, as we must, that our religion should continue to influence humanity for all times, we, its followers, must be good and pious, pure in character, and continuously affirm its tenets in our thought and action.

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi

Religion that is secular in character 1.2

Religion, which is eternal, is the property of all people. Any attempt to remove its influence from the masses will be only an exercise in futility. Whether one likes it or not, it is soaked in every individual and cannot be removed from him. For instance, one comes across a pavement dweller or a daily wage-earner getting out of the bed and worshipping

even a brick to which he or she applies some vermillion powder. For such persons it serves as a symbol of God and as the supreme power.

What is relevant to Hinduism is the basic faith entertained by all that God will certainly come to the succour of those who believe in Him. The intellectuals however visit temples or study scriptural texts and derive the benefit. The world cannot thrive even for a second without religious activity in some way or the other.

The common factor in all religions is the belief that there exists in it Transcendental Truth, acceptable by all and applicable to all. This idea will continue to be entertained for all time to come. The purpose of religion is the creation of Divine consciousness.

In a lecture, Sri Agnihotram Ramanuja Thathachariar said, Hinduism is secular in character giving scope for everyone to follow any of the numerous Gods, before him, in any manner he likes. Vedic religion dins into us that all religions should be honoured.

The Atharva Veda points out that there is only one God though He has many forms and there are different paths to reach Him. This is spelt out even in the Bhagavad Gita though Lord Krishna ultimately declares that He alone should be approached.

Hindus are catholic in their outlook as evidenced by the fact that they offer worship in all temples. They desire that unity should be maintained. Is it not a wonder that the Aiyappa cult has spread. No one compelled people to adopt this type of worship.

The Yadhavas were firmly attached to Lord Krishna while devotees in Ayodhya and elsewhere swore only in the name

of Sri Rama but they do not come into conflict with each other.

The basic feature is unity in diversity. It is a secular religion whose tenets, upheld by all, has to be, "the unity fostered by it maintained, the common factor promoted and the Divinity in each Hindu deity accepted".

January 5, 1991

Safeguard age-old spiritual values 1.3

India is proud to own a vast treasure of spiritual wisdom. It is a rich legacy handed down to posterity over centuries in the form of religious texts and exquisite idols. These constitute our wealth by virtue of which our country has come to be regarded as the temple and repository of culture and learning by the world. It is the duty of every Indian to safeguard the sanctity of the shrines and religious institutions at all costs.

While Indians are giants in the field of spiritualism, they are dwarfs in politics as compared with powerful nations. "We can never outgrow our foreign counterparts politically and it is therefore necessary to maintain our traditionally cultural and spiritual values. "India can win over conquerors culturally and not politically," says a non-Indian historian.

In spite of their ancient and enviable religious heritage, Indians behave like the proverbial swine which ignore the pearls cast before them. Instead of preserving the glorious treasure of culture bequeathed to them, people hanker after ideas imported from the West in the mistaken notion that whatever learnt from the West is the best. Indians have neglected

the scriptures and religious texts and given up rituals and other ceremonies. The irony is that what they have discarded as useless has come to be regarded as precious by us.

In this connection, Sri Sugunendra Thırtha Swami (Head of Udupi Puthige Math) cites the story of the monkey which managed to take away a few gems from a temple, climb a tree and sit on one of its branches. A clever man, hitting on a master plan to retrieve the gems, aimed a few pebbles at the monkey. The enraged animal in turn threw down the gems, which the wayfarer collected and walked away. "Our present plight is in no way better than that of the monkey. We are selling our valuable idols to foreigners and exporting our sacred literature. The foreigners admire our cultural saga whereas we clasp to our bosom as God-sent blessings, what they throw away, "he said.

The western people who are endowed with erudition, admire our treasures. They regard our idols and scriptures as priceless. Hence we should take care to safeguard our age-old spiritual values. If, on the other hand, the present state of affairs is allowed to continue, then, even as Buddhism which is near-extinct in the land of its birth is flourishing elsewhere, Hinduism may also share the same fate. Our scriptural lore, our bronzes and icons ought to be maintained well, the Swami said.

July 6, 1993

Mistaken notion about religion 1.4

Religion is more than mere austerity. It includes the control of emotions and the senses. Nowadays people ridicule any practice that is considered 'religious' and display lack

of faith in the supremacy of God. The Bhagavad Gita says that the pleasures enjoyed by man may be like nectar in the initial stage but will turn as poison after some time. Religious exercises may appear painful in the beginning but will be like elixir in the end. So, too, discipline will be hard to relish but will enable a person to keep physically and mentally alert. The present day problems of stress and strain stem out of the mistaken notion about religious duties. Those who decry our sacred heritage would hence do well to inquire into the different aspects of religion than wasting their energy in their attempts to censure those who sincerely practise them, knowing their value.

The scriptures remind men of the want of spiritual knowledge to assess the strength of others, particularly those who may not be favourably disposed toward them. Ravana perished because he mistook Rama to be a mortal. Duryodhana was destroyed as he thought that Krishna was just a cowherd. In Kanda Puranam, Soorapadman belittled the Divine child Subramania as worthless and was slain. Some who decry God and show disrespect to His devotees may thus have to regret later. Some may commit sins and indiscretions knowingly while others do them out of ignorance. Man will certainly fail before the Supreme Being.

Sri Kripanandavariar, in a discourse, narrated how a talented sculptor was informed by an astrologer about his death at a certain time. Instead of taking steps to spend his days in the service of God, the artisan designed a scheme to avoid his end by making 11 other replicas of himself, stationing himself amid them. The messengers of the Lord of Death who came to him on the appointed day were indeed puzzled to spot the real man whom they have to take with them. However, one among them hit at a plan to find out the man and casually remarked that one image among the 11 had a defect. Immediately, the sculptor, burst out that among

his creations, nothing can be imperfect. The culprit thus got exposed by his pride, impetuosity and folly.

The lecturer said God alone is perfect. No human being can equal Him. If he has to be approached, submission is the only way. The wedding of Valli with Subramania signifies that God alone was worthy of being sought after and how two devotees performed intense penance to win His grace.

July 12, 1993

All religions point to the same goal 1.5

All religions lead to the same goal and one religion is not in any way inferior or superior to the other. The goal is one, though the paths to reach it may be different. Hence people can take guidance from all of them but it is necessary to follow one path and one master. All creations of God without discrimination of caste, creed or colour have the privilege to sing His praise, worship Him and adopt methods to realise Him.

Wealth should be used for charitable purposes, scholastic attainments and knowledge to serve humanity and to undertake pious works, the power of speech to help others in their advancement and intellect for the realisation of God.

"Who is superior, you or the dog" asked a person when he saw a saintly-looking man, and a dog sleeping by his side. Without any ill-feeling, he replied: "Superiority does not belong to any one, but he who aspires to serve the Lord is indeed greater. One who merely enjoys worldly pleasures will only be wasting his life."

A king who once desired to know which religion is the best, summoned several spiritual leaders to debate on this question but each claimed that his was the most appealing. While the king was puzzled, an old man (Lord Dattatreya in disguise) took him to a river, promising to give a suitable answer to his doubt if they could cross it and reach the other side. The king brought many boats but the old man rejected all of them giving some excuse. The exasperated king ultimately compelled him to get into one and on reaching the other bank, wanted an answer. The old man disappeared and the king realised that just as he had chosen a raft, which though not perfect, had carried them safely across, so too, any religion he liked would serve his purpose.

God pervades the entire universe and is a witness to all our actions and hence a wrong done in secret does not enjoy immunity. Sri Ganapathi Sachchidananda Swami in a lecture, said a teacher was once preaching that God is present everywhere. To test how far the disciples had assimilated what he had taught, the teacher gave each one of them a fruit asking them to eat it in a place where no one will see them. Nine out of ten went to different inaccessible spots and consumed the fruits. One boy alone returned saying: "I find no place where God does not exist." The teacher was happy that the student had understood that God is omnipresent and none can hide any of his acts from Him.

November 12, 1994

Overcome problems with faith in God 1.6

Life is extremely precious, time highly valuable, man's heart tender and his mind is a gifted possession. Though endowed with all faculties, he conducts himself as a mean,

ignorant and miserable being. With his power of speech he can conquer kingdoms, but by its improper use he can also lose all his merits. Through his gentle words, he can acquire friends but by his injudicious utterances he can become their enemy. Forgetting his Divine nature he gets immersed in worldly pleasures and desires. Not realising the significance of time, he leads an animals existence.

The mind which is all-powerful can see without eyes, listen without ears, speak without a tongue and move without legs. Instead of controlling it, man becomes subordinate to the mind. Though Ravana was a scholar having mastered scriptures, yet he could not enjoy peace or bliss because he did not practise what he had learnt. On the other hand, Rama was always calm and put his knowledge to proper use. The Bhagavad Gita describes a true man of learning as one who sees different beings with an equal eye.

Three centuries ago, a poor muslim lad in North India who was ever meditating on God, left his home not keen on formal education. The effulgence in his face attracted people who gave him food. But when he started telling everyone that 'I am God', people ridiculed him. He justified that there is Divine energy in everyone but some use it for good while some misuse it. Faith made him declare in this manner. Such a firm faith should be cultivated by students. Evil-minded persons who always criticise others complained to the king. Even to this ruler, the boy replied that he was only uttering the truth as God dwells in every creation. "Like the beads of a rosary, He is the thread running through all beings." Even when his hands and limbs were severed, he never desisted from his resolve. From the burial ground where he was laid to rest, the cry 'I am God' continued.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba in a lecture urged students to use the power of discrimination and be guided by the voice of

consciousness. They should imprint on their hearts, the words of wisdom of the sages. They should realise that no one can escape the consequences of one's actions but by God's grace they can overcome difficulties. Never should they show ingratitude to those who had helped them to get trained as disciplined men.

The youth should serve society and put into practice at least a fraction of what they have studied. Real happiness consists in acquiring wisdom. Students should cultivate good company and cherish faith in God as He alone is their sole protector.

May 1, 1996

Religious exercises easy to adopt 1.7

God has provided mankind with numerous methods to realise the goal of life, to ensure a smooth journey here and enjoy peace of mind. The prescribed daily religious exercises are easy to be adopted and can be carried out without much effort. Taking bath early, performing certain minimal acts, visiting temples and paying obeisance to the Almighty and preceptors are not difficult. Observance of austerities is also not rigid. Still some people do not uphold them, though they are intended for their own good. Some even ridicule them and doubt their validity.

If God is so powerful, why cannot He change the attitude of such people and make them pious? The explanation given is that their present behaviour is a sequel to their past deeds -- good and bad -- and God does not interfere with their course and so He cannot be described as unkind. A mother will deny a particular item of food to her child who is sickly

and by no stretch of imagination can she be branded as cruel. She is quite aware of her child's needs. God is never partial and knows what one deserves.

A verse lists those who will hate or dislike certain procedures which all others acknowledge as beneficial. No one will refuse to welcome the soothening effect of the cool breeze that wafts during spring. But a jackal will be averse and resorts to its mischief only during nocturnal hours. In the Ramayana, when Vibhishana alone strongly pleaded with Ravana to send Sita back and save the entire demon race from Rama's anger, the adamant elder not only chided him but even used harsh and unsavoury remarks. The wicked will not like sane advice. Ravana's words indicated that his act was going to result in his ruin. Both the scholars, Periavachan Pillai and Desika have commented on this verse stressing his unfortunate streak of misconduct.

The Jeeyar Swami of Ahobila Math in a discourse mentioned about those who treaded a misguided path. There are a few who will not like those who lead a disciplined life, as adherence to one's duties will not be liked by them either due to their laziness or their antipathy towards well-regulated habits. Likewise, a thief will regret the rise of full-moon.

So also, some will be apathetic to learn the value of doctrines in the religious literature, but will be satisfied with superficial knowledge, even though the contents will be expounded by brilliant scholars. Their mind is not receptive to deeper knowledge. For their sake, erudite scholars will not descend to the level of these disinterested men. Devotees should hence follow Divine commands and seek God's grace and reject the path pursued by some as it will lead men nowhere.

October 19, 1996

Temples intrinsic to Indian culture 1.8

An individual who worships some form of God according to his religious tradition and belief and people gathering in one place to collectively offer obeisance to God for the fulfilment of their desires are intrinsic to Indian culture.

Kings and wealthy persons used to build temples, install idols and organise festivals for religious purposes so that people may serve God, who in the present era, will bless His devotees in the image form. That is the reason why there is no town without a temple in India. Our ancestors discovered that a person can achieve happiness both here and hereafter by worship of God.

Renovation and preservation of temples are rooted in our culture. These symbols of faith have made India known throughout the world as a nation with a distinct identity. Scriptures refer to two forms of worship -- the conduct of religious rites (like yagna and yaga) which is external and observance of fasting and other rituals, which is internal. They fetch peace.

All except those who have renounced worldly life desire happiness, which motivates them to act. But if one is asked whether by going through such acts, one has experienced happiness, the reply will be "not yet, I am trying." If this is the situation, what is one's duty? How can he enjoy this happiness? It is for this that our ancestors have prescribed worship of God.

Speaking on Srivaishnava Agamas, Sri Yadugiri Yathiraja Jeeyar Swami of Melkote explained that performance of rituals and acts done for public good pleases God who will bless people with timely rains, adequate food and heavenly joy.

It is not possible to directly see God in this era. Therefore, idols are worshipped.

Devotees need objects for their meditation. God is omnipresent and omniscient even when He presents Himself in idols. He fulfils their wishes when images are made, consecrated, installed and worshipped with devotion. Welfare of the people will not be ensured if idols, which do not conform to proper proportions and form, are installed. On the contrary, there will be general well-being if the idols and the shrines are according to those texts which prescribe their shape and dimensions.

Every temple has various artistic and functional features, known as styles, which are codified and described in the Agamas, Silpa Sastras and the Puranas. Temples have been built only according to the guidelines therein and not in the names of kings. It has to be remembered that temples are built based only on rules and not as per the whims and fancies of a person. All should realise that if men adhere to the Law of Righteousness, it will protect the entire world.

April 30, 1997

Scriptures sanction worship of idols 1.9

Among the doubts entertained by sceptics about Hindu religious tradition, one relates to the significance of idols worshipped in temples and homes. Does God reside in them is their question. The categorical answer is "yes" by those who believe in the power of the Almighty In earlier eras, God presented Himself even physically before His devotees or made them experience His greatness indirectly. But in the present age, He answers the sincere prayer of man through images. Saints and Divine messengers have sung in praise

of the consecrated idols and have proved how He responds to the submissions made by them. These God-men have solemnly declared that·God has innumerable auspicious qualities, is blemishless and is easily accessible to devotees.

In this age when problems, ignorance, falsehood and other evil forces abound, ready to confront a person, God alone can provide relief through the worship of idols. These images have been duly consecrated and are worshipped through qualified priests. Saints who had visited these shrines have sung hymns adoring the beauty of the idols which have been made strictly according to the scriptural texts on Sculpture.

In his discourse, the Jeeyar Swami of Vanamamalai Math illustrated the role of idols in providing peace to worshippers through an episode in Swami Vivekananda's life. Even Vivekananda was initially a rationalist but at the crucial turning point he became aware of the glorious Indian spiritual tradition and become a Divine messenger.

Once he visited a wealthy chieftain who was foreign-educated and who did not have much respect for Indian heritage. He used to decry image worship. Vivekananda was given prior information about his host's attitude. While being led to a hall in the host's mansions, the Swami found several portraits of his forbears.

The ruler showed reverence to one among them and said it was his father's. Vivekananda did an unexpected act of suddenly spitting at it, which naturally angered the former. Vivekananda asked him whether his father lived in that portrait and what was the sanctity in it. The wealthy man, who was told that idols were equally sacred for devotees changed his view.

In case of expediency there can be slight adjustments in the procedure for private worship because God has declared that He will accept any genuine gesture. Whereas in temples, the procedure should be strictly adhered to. In construction, installation, as well as worship the scriptural guidelines should never be violated the priests should also maintain discipline and purity, conduct the worship in accordance with the directives in the Agamas -- whether Pancharatra or Vaikhanasa.

May 2, 1997

Bereft of religion, an endless road 1.10

Why do we need religion? Will not man survive without it? These questions may arise in many among us. It is possible for men to survive without religion. But the vital factor to be remembered is, in that case, a person will be taking a trip down an endless road. It is very important for a traveller to use a map or a guide while undertaking a journey. Religion serves this role when a human being during his brief existence will require such a help and religion fills the gap as a map or a guide to travel on the vast unknown road of life and reach the destination safely. Otherwise, he will be lost in wilderness. Religion strengthens man's character, and provides him with a code of conduct for his safe voyage in his life.

But religion cannot be thrust on anyone. A person has to accept it with his heart and follow the rules laid down in the charter of duties so as to avoid pitfalls and reach his goal. Another valid doubt may crop as to the future of religion in this materialistic world. Will it be necessary in the context of the fantastic changes which are now taking place? The answer is that religion matters very much even now because all scientific ideas can be obtained from religious

books available. Science and religion go together and in all his inventions and his leaps forward, man reposes his faith in God. When something happens against his expectations, he kneels before God with his prayers. Man may be seen moving more towards religion in his search for God.

Religion has been defined as "all actions and thoughts, concerned with our belief in and prayers to God" and its important constituent is belief in His powers. It need not be blind faith or zealotry. Religion refers to the continuous process of gathering knowledge and updating it periodically. The power exercised by men of religion can be felt in the world. However, there appears to be some confusion among people as to which religion is the best. Instead of quarrelling over this, each one should try to practise respective religions in the best way possible.

In a lecture, Acharya Rajyash Surishwarji explained how religion can change man's mind and the best example is that of Valmiki, author of the Ramayana, who was a robber but got chastened by the teachings of Sage Narada. The insatiable thirst of knowledge of a Muslim king, who was a descendent from a line of rulers known for their intolerance, led to the birth of a new religion. To those who believe in the existence of a superior force guiding their destiny, there is no necessity to convince about God's presence. To those who refuse to believe in God, any amount of explanation will be of no avail.

October 22, 1997

Need to heed call of the Vedas 2.1

The Vedas, the treasure-trove of Hindu religion, tradition and culture, containing codes of righteous conduct, were taught by God Himself thousands of years ago and have been preserved carefully and handed over to us. They are absolutely essential for building moral integrity and being eternal, the norms are applicable to all persons even to this day.

Sri Sengalipuram Anantarama Dikshitar in a discourse said their study, which was absolutely necessary for everyone, would cleanse the mind and make it pure, help mould character and aid achieve mental equanimity. The contents in the Vedas have been broadly divided into three branches, dealing with the paths of action, knowledge and devotion (Karma, Gnana and Upasana kandams), treading which, one can reach the ultimate goal--the Supreme. The Karmakandam prescribed the rites one should do and explains how by observing them, materialistic tendencies can be wiped out. Their performance will bring prosperity not only for the individual but entire universe. The Do's and Dont's should be strictly adhered to and works like Vidhura Neethi and the answers by Sri Sankara for the 181 questions put by his disciple should be mastered. The chanting of Vedic hymns would automatically make us shed bad thoughts just like a snake casting off its skin at the time of moulting itself being un-aware.

Rites should be observed with interest and avidity, anticipating absolutely no reward. On sacred days like Amavasya and Ekadasi, one should remain pure and not indulge in

prohibited acts. Charity should be given liberally and without any mental reservation. Nothing dedicated to God or said in praise of His glory would go waste.

September 9, 1965

Supreme authority of Vedas 2.2

When we realise that we are but the servants of the Almighty, we will never retain arrogance borne of our pelf and possession, Servitude to God is the antidote for egoism, But a devotee who prefers to be such a slave should never be idle. He has to carry out the master's bidding. The Lord says that we must obey His commands, worship Him and offer all our belongings to Him. "Dasatva" increases our faith in God and provides us strength and eradicates our chief disease--arrogance.

Sri Vidyamanya Thirtha of Palimar Math in a discourse, pointed out that human beings are living in a grand inn, called the "Samsara". The builder had originally put up a notice prescribing certain conditions for those desirous of occupying it.

With the efflux of time, others claiming to be its owners, super-imposed other notices containing stipulations which they felt were proper, reasonable and conducive to man's happiness. The trouble arises as to which of these directives are correct and to be adhered to. The very first notice contains the mandates of the Vedas prescribing the Do's and the Dont's. Human reasoning cannot settle, by using the powers of thinking, what is right and wrong. For instance, a school of thought may hold Ahimsa as an absolute virtue. But under certain

circumstances, it may not be valid. To kill an individual suffering from an incurable and excruciatingly painful disease, may not be a sin. The authority of the Vedas alone will hold good in distinguishing the Good from the Evil.

The duty of a devotee is to obey these injunctions and live according to them. Sri Madhwacharya has defined the good acts as those which are prescribed in the Vedas. The ultimate fact that determines the morality of an act is the approval of God. Arjuna contended that killing his cousins and teachers was sinful but the Lord, by a chain of matchless logic, cleared his legitimate doubts.

January 23, 1980

Vedas relevant for all ages 2.3

The holy utterances and the foundation for Hindu religion, termed the Vedas, are unique in that the revelations therein are not only relevant for all ages but they have raised several doubts which a commoner may harbour within him and have provided suitable and valid explanations. They are classified as exoteric and esoteric, the former dealing with the ceremonial acts and the latter with the acquisition of spiritual knowledge.

It may surprise the atheist who questions the existence of God and the significance of rituals, that more than 2,000 identical queries had been raised in the Vedas. Of what purpose is the offer of oblations in sacrificial fire and what is the guarantee that they reach the concerned--the usual challenge thrown by many--have been answered convincingly. The token of offerings multiply themselves when handed over

through the medium of fire(agni) even as a few seedlings sown in a tiny field result in a bumper harvest.

The Vedas were recited, in days of yore, to ensure the prosperity of citizens, Scholars did not chant them for personal gains alone. God provided them with what they needed. The three monthly showers which used to regularly pour, were intended to honour the Vedic pandits, the rulers who administered the kingdom efficiently and to women of chastity.

With faith in the Vedic rituals, emperor Dasaratha, who had no child, --conducted a sacrifice, invoking divine blessings. Contemporaneously, celestials appealed to the Lord to descend to the world and save the pious who were being tortured by evil forces.

In his discourse Sri Mukkur Lakshminarasimhachariar said God was born as Sri Rama to establish moral order.

June 3, 1981

Elevating teachings of Saints 2.4

Even as a physician of the indigenous medical system first purges a patient of all impurities before commencing the treatment, the people of India, which is now beset with problems, should first be reformed and then exposed to the message of the Vedanta contained in the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. This will make them heroic and enable them to develop character.

Other nations too experience worse problems -- of extreme materialism and some kind of inexplicable despondency and

lack of genuine love even between man and wife. People all over the world look to Indian philosophy for guidance The Srutis explain eternal truths and remain authoritative statements for all time. The Smritis are like coins of a previous regime not recognised by subsequent rulers. India can claim that its Vedanta is based on human dignity. The message therein provides the inner strength making a person adopt a positive attitude. For this, a proper technique in unfolding the dormant energy should be adopted.

Swami Ranganadananda, pointed out in a lecture that the stirring words of Vivekananda could make people ideal. India is endowed with a philosophy that could take it to great heights but was in the same plight as that of a man seated on the banks of the Ganga and yet seeking water to quench his thirst. For all its maladies India has the remedy. Not only the external but the inner personality of individuals should be developed.

June 17, 1981

Violation of Dharma angers God 2.5

The prosperity enjoyed by some and the agony experienced by others, make devotees wonder whether God showers His compassion only on those whom He likes and is unkind to those who incur His displeasure. These sceptics should just analyse the causes that make God appear to show such a differential treatment If God appears to be angry towards some and dislikes them, the reason lies only with the people themselves,because of their defiance of the directives given by Him. God has prescribed a Constitution for mankind and if its laws are violated, naturally He will be unhappy.

Hence people should not blame the Almighty for their own defaults; if so, they can be likened to youngsters who, refusing to be disciplined, not attending to their study and disobeying their parents, complain that the latter are not favourably disposed towards them.

In a discourse, Sri Abhinava Vidya Thirtha, Sringeri Sankar-acharya said every man, to the extent possible and with sincerity, should follow the injunctions contained in the Sastras. He should abide by the Law of Dharma, undertake to carry out the specific duties enjoined upon him and refrain from doing prohibited acts. For this, he should know what constitutes Dharma and what Adharma means. What is good for him and what is to be abjured as evil and vice are laid down in scriptural texts. One of man's essential duties is to respect his aged parents and attend to their comforts instead of neglecting them, considering them as a burden..For this, certain rites and austerities ought to be conducted by him, daily and on specified occasions, certain deeds are to be practised, like helping a brilliant but poor student. All his acts should be considered as a dedication to God.

January 20, 1982

When Vedic mantras are efficacious 2.6

Many among us sometimes feel frustrated that after carrying out various religious exercises (like Pujas and expiatory rites) to ward off evil and overcome problems, by chanting the Vedic mantras, we do not achieve the desired results. On the contrary, the results may be adverse. A little self-introspection will help us locate the fault.

Our sages and forbears chanted the Vedic mantras themselves with perfection, pronouncing the syllables without flaw. The mantras, which are potent, will fetch the fruits only if the recitors strictly adhere to tradition. Many not only fail to utter them properly themselves, but prefer to engage priests paying them a little money. They neither care to conduct the Pujas nor adhere to Vedic injunctions with faith and devotion, without which nothing can be achieved. Often people speak of lack of time to learn the Vedic mantras. Self-introspection will reveal how they spend hours on worldly activities after office work.

Sri Bharathi Thirtha of Sringeri Sarada Peetam, pointed out that strangely people feel they have no time to carry out even the minimal daily spiritual exercises. "Everyone should remember that he causes his own good or bad, herein and hereafter". Every action causes reaction, and so one's elevation is in his own hands. Sages who were patient and persevering, maintained their equanimity and did not show their malice towards even those who wronged them, though they possessed the power to destroy them. They did their penance with sincerity and faith. But the patience and perseverance of present-day people were born out of "weakness"; their claim to equanimity was due to compulsion.

November 10, 1982

The four Vedic commandments 2.7

Even at the dawn of Indian history, the familiar questions used to be. "Who is God?" and "Is He visible and perceivable?"

The Vedas -- Divine utterances annotated by sages with reference to specific contexts -- provide the answer. It is possible to experience God, the seers have assured, provided man becomes really human, shedding the beastly traits in him. In this connection, the following four commandments have been given priority: worship your mother; revere your father; obey your spiritual mentor; and honour your guest. If all these are observed scrupulously, they will certainly enable one to have the vision of god.

The prime dedication should go to the mother, who has delivered us into the world. "She is a veritable God." Next is the father who tends us. The spiritual guide, the third in order, removes our ignorance, imparts knowledge and shows the path of God realisation. The Acharya, however, should distinguish himself by the basic qualifications -- desirelessness and total detachment. Even God, donning the robes of mortals bowed before Gurus. Then comes the true guest; he is one who remains indebted to the host for his hospitality. Lord Krishna chose to stay with the humble Vidhura instead of with the pompous Duryodhana as it would compel Him to be ever grateful to him. The difference between the two was while Vidhura told the Lord, "It is your house, please enter," the haughty Duryodhana said "Come to my palace."

Sri N. Giridhari Prasad, in his discourse referred to the Nayanmars, the Azhwars and others who have worshipped God as mother or father or both, as revealed in their outpourings.

Sri Rama, the ideal son, sacrificed an empire and smilingly retired to the forest to spend 14 years there, implicitly obeying His father. Another inimitable character in the scriptures was Bhishma who remained a celibate till his death to enable his father to re-marry and enjoy worldly pleasures.

April 8, 1983

Nothing is greater than spiritual wisdom 2.8

God alone is the judge of all our acts. He alone can extend proper rewards or punishments for our deeds. To accept His existence and of the individual soul, we need full belief in scriptures. The Vedas, which exist from time immemorial, disclose the presence of the Almighty, the soul and of virtue. Righteous conduct alone can keep society in a disciplined manner. If it is argued that righteousness depends on strength, the mightier man can wipe out the less mighty. Hence mankind has to stand by a principle, other than mere physical strength, to govern the world and "Dharma" will sustain it. This follows that we have to submit ourselves to the Lord and worship Him to obtain release from bondage, through His grace, which is the last word in scriptures. We should know about His majesty, splendour and supremacy. Nothing is greater than spiritual wisdom and there is none greater than the Lord, even according to His own proclamation.

In a lecture Sri Sathyapramoda Thirtha of Utharadhi Math touched on the divergent views held by the atheists and believers in God. The former deny everything except those which can be perceived by the senses. "We see the world and our body but not our soul and hence we do not accept the existence of the soul" they say. Apart from the body, they admit of only the elements - world, fire and water, not even of ether, not to speak of sound. They disclaim "Dharma". They do not accept any code of conduct or creed except to live happily, borrowing money from others, without the necessity to return it because the soul is destroyed with the body. This philosophy of the materialists will only promote anarchy. On this plea even the wealth of a preceptor can be plundered by the disciples. This will not be conducive to society. Their contention is that if one cannot lift a stone, two can and thus a number of elements can produce the soul. Those who abide by the Vedas reply that the elements are insentient

and hence admit the existence of the individual soul apart from the body.

October 29, 1986

Puranas explain Veda dictum 2.9

Our noble religious traditions, the hoary heritage and the rich cultural background are based on the Vedas. But they are terse in nature and are not easily assimilable by the common man. The privilege of removing the unwanted matter from this huge pile of truth was granted to sage Vyasa, who dedicated the 18 Puranas and other works to enable humanity to follow the guidelines in the Vedas. Some people may ask whether the Puranas are needed at all and whether they have any relevance now since their very name suggests their antiquity. Even as the watch repairer needs a magnifying glass to examine the delicate mechanism inside or the diamond merchant to spot out the blemishes in the gems, the Puranas amplify the contents of the Vedas.

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse referred to the analogy given by poet Kamban (who wrote the Tamil adaptation of the Ramayana) that Vyasa removed the "riddles" in the Vedas even as Sri Sita carefully separated the strands of Her coiffeur which got matted owing to lack of attention during Her ten-month captivity. The Vedas give a command "Satyam Vada" - Utter the Truth. But this requires an elaboration and commentary. Vyasa's contribution to this was by way of writing the Harishchandra Purana wherein the significance and import of the above dictum are explained. A king who accepted the challenge that he would never utter a lie had to undergo unimaginable ordeals. He refused to speak anything contrary to his words even when he was grilled to such an extent that he was about

to collapse. So too was another king Nala who was driven to the situation of working as a syce. Similarly in the Ramayana, the poet describes the state of terror which Sri Sita experienced because of Ravana's threat. She never slept all the ten months-the poet says, a description that defies imagination. But annotated properly, Her agony could be compared to a person who is asked to sleep in a room with all modern comforts but is gently reminded that a cobra may enter the room by one window and make its exit by another during the night. Can the man have his rest?

March 18, 1987

Comprehensible version of the abstract 2.10

God, who is all powerful, is infinitely merciful; but as one who has to uphold Moral Law, it becomes His duty to punish those who violate it. The Divinity's duty is to maintain the stability of social order. The Vedic commands take care of the welfare of the human being and are ever vigilant directing the people to follow the scientific and rational path.

The God of the Vedas is beyond our thought and words, yet He is made comprehensible to the human mind. A unique feature of the Vedas is its adoption of humanistic approach to abstract and difficult subjects. In a lecture, Sri Agnihotram Ramanuja Thathachariar said according to the Rig Veda, not even a small particle can move without God. Religion should first understand the problems of man and prescribe a scheme for his good life here. In this respect, the approach of the Vedas is complete. Social, political and economic problems of life have been taken into account by the Vedas and a scheme

has been framed to attain prosperity in all walks of life. With this, the common man's mind is fully satisfied.

Vedic religion, philosophy and culture are based on the Rig Veda only. In the Rig Veda mantras, Gods are not only given human forms but even human attributes and functions. Vedic religion brings God nearer to man. From the common man's point of view, religion is practical while at the intellectual's level, it is pragmatic. Through the adoption of Vedic religion, divine consciousness can easily be kept at all times, even in the material world.

September 8, 1989

Potential of Vedic utterances 2.11

India's culture and her glorious tradition spring from the Vedas, which are God's gift to mankind. No one can say when they were first dedicated nor predict when (and whether) they will end. They are eternal commands for shaping man's good conduct and for developing an impeccable character. They reveal God and contain advice as well as correctives. If they are upheld, humanity's happiness and prosperity will be assured. But the very source of this fountain is getting dry in the sense that the number of scholars who take to their study is dwindling.

Those who protect the Vedas will certainly get divine blessings, according to a scriptural statement. These revelations spell out the Do's and Dont's. They have to be learnt only through a traditional style, by oral instruction by a teacher Its vitality has been maintained over centuries, continuously. But many are not getting trained since they do not get support from the public.

Vedic scholars can indeed be described as those having undergone the greatest sacrifice as they are not sure of their future prospects. Hence, it is the duty of religious-minded men to encourage them, honour them and give them an exalted status so that they can carry on the task of propagating God's message uninterruptedly.

Sri Jayendra Saraswathi in a discourse said, Vedic utterances are based on vibrant sound syllables and hence ought to be pronounced properly. Even a slight alteration in their structure could spell disaster, conveying an entirely different meaning. If chanted with deep knowledge as to what these statements convey, the benefit would be immense. Even without understanding their meaning, people would be moved, as they contain Mantras. The Vedas cover the entire gamut of man's activities. It has six constituents including Astrology.

Adi Sankara derived his strength to re-establish Hinduism and faced various forces only from the Vedas. Apart from the Mantras enshrined in them, they show the path to reach God's kingdom, making a person recall wherefrom he hailed, where he will go and what are the obstacles for re-entering God's domain.

Unlike hymns learnt by tapes and played during personal worship, the Vedas should be mastered only through the ancient system of Gurukulam. Even the attendance at places where the Ramanayana and Mahabharatha are being expounded, is becoming thin. The study of Sanskrit should be encouraged by the people and the Vedas tell us how to end the cycle of re-births.

February 15, 1990

Vedas: God's indelible message 2.12

The date of the origin of Hinduism cannot be fixed by anyone and so too are God's utterances in the form of the Vedas. These revelations, containing indelible rules relating to man's safe voyage in life are paramount, infinite and have no end. They can be compared to precious treasures which cannot be placed at the hands of children.

Forming the base of our culture, tradition and religion, they have continued to be transmitted from scholars well-versed in them, to groups of disciples, who in turn taught others. Such a process of learning required certain amount of physical and mental discipline.

Some may question why these secrets cannot be learnt by all. Even as an office assistant cannot handle a sophisticated machine for which only the services of technical personal are to be obtained, the Vedic message has to be conveyed to the qualified only.

The Vedas ought to be accepted by all. They reveal God's forms and commands. If a man breathes, it will naturally mean, he is alive. So too, if he should exist, he must continue to inhale and exhale. They are complementary acts and thus people who know the significance of the Vedas will admit the presence of the Almighty. The Vedic injunctions caution people to listen only to what is good and only to those statements which would make them lead a life of virtue.

Another message is that if charity is extended to an undeserving person, sin will accrue to the donor. God in human from has stated this in the Ramayana. The glory of this "All-comprehensive knowledge" (the Vedas) is mentioned in the Bhagavatham.

In one of His 24 manifestations as emperor Prithu, Mother Earth praised him for His able administration and pointed out that anyone of the later times who follows with faith and reverence, these expedients, found and taught by the ancient masters, would achieve the purpose of life and that those who disregard them would not succeed in their efforts.

When Prithu (a part-manifestation) stopped performing his 100 horse sacrifice, he was hailed. The Supreme Being (in all His splendour) who presides over yagas, appeared and explained to him how, pious souls who are possessed of good understanding will bear no illwill against their fellow beings. The awakened soul, knowing the real nature of this body would never get attached to it. Later, discarding all royal comforts, Prithu practised asceticism,Sri B. Sundar Kumar said in his discourse.

March 8, 1991

Vedas, God's priceless gift to man 2.13

Man, the creation of God, has limitations in respect of all his functions. He possesses only a restricted amount of power and valour. He can live only for a few years. Still, with his short-comings, he can rise to the level of the Divinity by adopting procedures laid down in the spiritual laws and by properly shaping his personal conduct and by not violating the directions. The methods are contained in the Vedas, which are God's revelations.

These Vedic injunctions are permanent and cannot be altered. These priceless gifts of God should be preserved. The Vedic utterances govern all aspects of a man's life. The

Vedas do not distinguish mankind as high or low. They can be followed only by human beings and so one should consider oneself extremely fortunate in having been caused to be born as a man.

People should depend on the grace showered by God and realise that not a blade of grass can grow if God so wills. We experience grief because we have lost the moral strength and drifted away from our spiritual moorings.

Sri Manjakkudi Rajagopala Sastrigal in a discourse said, man, getting up from his bed should reflect on the pious deeds he had carried out the previous day. He should not have offended or caused mental injury to anyone. He should not have uttered falsehood.

Speaking Truth has been listed as the foremost among the several Divine commands. In the Bhagavatham this is reflected by the adoration by celestials that "Truth" is the highest means of attaining the Lord, and that He had existed since the universe (as known to mortals) appeared. He continues to manifest Himself now and He shall be present for ever, though He may not be seen by our eyes. But God will be pleased if we adhere to the guidelines laid by Him.

Even as we require a physician's help to get our illness cured, we should seek the guidance of the Vedic statements to lead an unblemished life based on virtue, by keeping our thoughts, words and deeds pure and alike. Many are now eager to know the relevance of the Vedas to modern days.

September 14, 1991

Vedas contain guidelines for peace, harmony 2.14

God has provided a manual for mankind to maintain harmony in the world because human achievements are possible only when there is peace. It is called "Dharma Sastra," which forms the first of the two major divisions of the Vedas, the other one being "Tathwa Sastra."

There is a mistaken impression among some that the Vedas advocate asceticism only. Far from this, they ask all to enjoy material pleasures but impose a simple condition that they should be within the constitutional framework of virtue (Dharma).

Another erroneous notion that the Vedas may be of no validity now should also be dispelled. When they tell people to speak the "Truth," there cannot be a change in its value whether uttered in the fifth century or in the present time. Not to utter falsehood is a norm that holds good for ever.

Indian culture is based on the fundamental scriptures known as the Vedas, whose traditions are timeless and have been passed on orally from the teachers to the disciples. Having thus a divine origin, they (also called Srutis) contain directives which sustain the activities of the universe in an organised manner so that there is harmony and peace. To help maintain this harmony, everyone should see eye to eye. Extended further, this need for united action, will have to be applied to family, society and the nation. Harmonious existence thus supports everything, from the individual to the cosmos.

Swami Paramatmananda in a lecture pointed out that what was required was not the creation of harmony but making people lead lives which do not disturb this already available

God-given gift. Man has the powers to use or misuse it and so can disturb harmony because animals and plants will not indulge in this act. God has given this manual to man, as he alone requires it, since one cannot talk of values to animals. Without giving an option, the Vedas direct him to follow the path of righteous conduct.

At the same time, the Vedas never say that men should not enjoy life, but they add "Let this be in keeping with Dharma." The Vedas are not against material welfare. Hence, the view among some that the Indians are not progressive because they are against materialism, is wrong. As people become more and more mature, they will realise that these worldly pleasures are of no consequence and discover that there is something more profound and of higher value.

October 24, 1992

Uniqueness of Vedic religion 2.15

Unifying people at all levels is an arduous task but it is necessary for the progress of human civilisation; otherwise, only the law of the jungle will prevail. One of the rare contributions of the Vedas is the insistence on unity among all. Achieving it should be based on the acceptance of diversity also. While collectivism is human culture, animals believe in isolationism. Man's common prayer is "Let the people of entire universe prosper.

Unity in diversity at the world level is the favourite theory of the Vedas. Even enemies should thrive but their wickedness should turn to goodness. A criticism often directed against the Vedas is that their prayers and rituals are aimed

only at the prosperity of a particular race or caste. It is not a fact. They are intended for the welfare of the entire humanity. Though Vedic seers lived in forests, their thinking related to the prosperity of the people at large. Their ideas originated from a divine source and hence they were uncontaminated by any prejudice based on race, caste, country or creed.

Aswamedayaga was aimed at bringing the whole world under one flag without bloodshed or war. The superior power, however, never exploited the minor kingdoms for political or economic considerations. The emperors upheld the dictum "All must live." The Vedas similarly recognised the multitude of languages, different habits of food, clothing and other customs which varied from country to country. A Rig Veda mantra urges all people to be good, in all walks of life.

Sri Agnihotram Ramanuja Thathachariar said no religion other than Vedic religion tolerates the existence of another. It never claims any exclusiveness; nor does it destroy other religions by adopting authorised or unauthorised ways. As the fundamental theory is that God is one, it becomes necessary to tolerate other religions. The Gita followed the idea of unity from the Vedas and applied it later to Hinduism only.

The Vedas advise people to approach God in any manner, by giving names and forms, so that He may become accessible to all. The pathways to God, according to them, are numerous but they all ultimately lead to the same goal. Renouncing fanaticism, the Vedas look at problems of the world with a broad outlook, which serves as the unique greatness of the Vedic religion.

October 28, 1993

Upholding righteousness, message of the Vedas 2.16

The oldest religion, Hinduism,has its source in the Vedas which are God's revelations. They contain directives to make a man's life happy and urge him to abide by the Law of Virtue. They prescribe a code of ethics and religious practices. The day-to-day life of the Indian people is controlled by the various injunctions contained in this Law which broadly points out how righteous methods should be adopted.

Though the Vedas are without a beginning in terms of time, yet since they are divine in nature, they have kept in mind, man's needs and aspirations, his quest for peace and the link that ought to be established between God and an individual soul.

Knowledge and wisdom are enshrined in 14 sacred texts:the four Vedas, the six Vedangas(auxiliaries), Meemamsa (interpretation of Vedic statements), Nyaya(logic),Puranas and Sastras. To these 14 are to be added four upangas (appendices to the Vedangas).(They are Ayurveda, Arthasastra, Dhanur Veda and Gandharva Veda). The well-being of the world is possible only by the operation of this good Law of governance. The commandments in these texts spell out gradual lessons to enable aspirants to ascend step-by-step. A study of this founthead of spiritual knowledge will not only elevate man's thoughts, making him a pious and God-minded person, but see that he helps build a noble society.

In ancient days, those who preserved the Vedas and propagated them were respected by the rulers and were kept above want with gifts of lands and even villages. Even in the very first of the ten incarnations, God retrieved the Vedas, stolen and kept hidden by a powerful enemv.

The most vital message of the Vedas is that we should zealously uphold righteousness, said Sri Vijayendra Saraswathi of Kanchi in a lecture. The present-day turmoil and confusion arise because rules which if followed would make us contented, have been ignored in the wake of advancement in various fields. But study of technology and spiritual education could go together. Because our forebears safeguarded the Vedas, India was described as a "Land of piety".

Only the observance of the guidelines contained in the scriptures would promote discipline. To know what these are, the Epics and Puranas are being expounded in temples and other places, so that all could know their significance. Listening to them also indicated besides people's rights, their responsibilities too. Spiritual education should hence be imparted at various levels.

November 20, 1993

Preservation of our culture vital 2.17

The fact that the Vedic revelations have survived the tides of time so long testifies to some divine phenomenon catering to the material and spiritual aspirations of the people. Institutions engaged in the analytical study of these divine statements have been fascinated by the wealth of information, touching all aspects of society as well as human behaviour. Digging into the mine of Vedic knowledge has resulted in unearthing several secrets which the scientific talent has discovered at a later stage.

It may surprise many to know that a reference to the atom and nuclear fission is contained in this treasure of ancient

wisdom. Generations of scholars who studied God's utterances, have provided details of various truths embedded in them in Sanskrit. It is a misfortune that this Divine language is now being described as a 'dead' one. On the other hand, since it has eternal value and relevance, it should be called 'never dying' one. The Divine revelations were rendered in Tamil by subsequent masters and this language is compared to 'honey'.

Sanskrit and Tamil have been given equal importance by our forbears who considered them as the eyes of a person. Apart from integrating all parts of the country, they brought out the hidden values. In their outpourings, apostles have rendered the translations of these Divine revelations and hence people vied with one another in mastering both the languages. There has been a gradual decline in the standards of spoken Tamil but in its pure state, this language, particularly in the written style was admirable. The Saiva Agamas and the Pancharatra and other texts spelling out the systems of spiritual knowledge reflect the glory of these two languages.

Explaining how town planning in ancient days received society's attention. Sri Andavan Swami in a discourse said, an ancient Tamil text compared the formation of a city to that of a lotus with its central stalk surrounded by eight petals and containing the pollen grains, a few within and some fallen down. They represent the central portion of the city, the streets, the houses and the human beings.

Likewise the texts mention about the natural smell of Mother Earth. Granite dug out of it may not give any smell but when powdered, these will emanate a fragrance. The Mahabharata reveals how a Tamil emperor supplied food for the army engaged in the Kurukshetra battle. The works of Kalidasa and Chanayaka provide enormous details about cultural ethos and political sagacity. Samudragupta's strategy in war

bewilders one. It is hence necessary to preserve the sanctity of these two eyes and bring out, through research, more vital facts governing the State and the society.

October 11, 1995

Man reaps the fruits of his deeds 2.18

The guidelines for an ideal life contained in the Divine Law are being faithfully followed by many sincere people. But, at times they too are baffled by challenging problems. They get distressed and wonder why they are being punished for no fault of theirs. Scriptures provide explanations for such riddles and prescribe acts of atonements to mitigate their sufferings. As Hinduism is founded on the principle that pious acts will fetch good results while wicked deeds will results in unpleasant consequences, comfort can be derived that some mistakes in the past might be the cause of their grief.

To avoid getting involved in worldly activities and refrain from indulging in prohibited acts, those who rely on scriptural authority have been asked to abide by the Law of Virtue. The measures needed to lead a peaceful life, have been placed before them, in the form of the Vedas. When any clarification is necessary people can seek their guidance or from those who are well versed in them. Men of merit acquire spiritual powers and saintly qualities by virtue of the study of the Vedas daily for about 15 years from a very young age.

For others not privileged to memorise the Vedic commandments, the teachings have been made available in the Epics and the Puranas. The characters in these scriptural texts are symbols of virtue. In the Ramayana, the hero is portrayed

as the replica of righteousness. Even His foe certifies that He would never violate the law, under tempting circumstances too. In the other Epic, the chief villain wants to know who will win the war. When it was stated that success was assured for those who stand by the moral law, he acknowledged that his opponents were the genuine upholders of the Divine Law. The two epics bring out the consequences of avarice and passion.

In his discourse, Sri N. Babu Dikshitar said, the Mahabharatha, called the fifth Veda, is full of morals. It is a misconception that the poem is not to be studied at home. While pointing out that human life is a precious gift of God. Scriptures describe all men belonging to the four divisions as friends. The Pandavas placed total reliance on the advice of men of wisdom, never swerved from the path of righteous conduct and depended on the support of God in every move they resorted to. Hence success was theirs in the war between good and evil.

Their cousins, who stooped to demoniac deeds to achieve their goal were revengeful, cunning and showed scant respect for the suggestions of experienced elders and disobeyed Divine rules. Dhritarashtra instead of curbing their heinous designs abetted their wicked schemes. In the clash between virtue and vice, the former was vindicated and truth triumphed.

April 16, 1996

Material pursuits enslave man 2.19

All human endeavour can be broadly classified into two types of pursuits. The constant struggle to procure things

of the material world, maintaining and using them, and becoming totally dependent on them is the kind of existence which we commonly see in man's life. This is known as 'Preyas'.

The other is the pursuit of 'Sreyas', when realising the futility of leading a life dependent on comforts which only enslave man, efforts are made to overcome dependence on material things. This independence can be achieved through the process of Self-discovery. By discovering the Self man is liberated from the dependence on worldly objects and is liberated from bondage.

Here we have to learn to differentiate between using a material object when it is available and the process of becoming totally dependent on it. A life of Preyas is one when man becomes subservient to material things and a life of Sreyas is one in which he continues to lead a life in the world, but in total freedom, without becoming servile to material needs. This distinction in man's life hinges on the discovery of the Self.

Scriptures deal with both these aspects of man's life and the primary scriptures are the Vedas which are four in number - Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. The Purva (beginning) portion of the Vedas explains the manner in which the Self can be discovered. The Vedas have been elaborated in the Smriti texts, the Puranas and the Itihasas.

In his lecture Swami Paramarthananda said, the Vedas do not enforce anything on man. They elaborately deal with both the ends that can be pursued and leave the choice to man. Man has the freedom to lead a life as he chooses. i.e. whether to pursue a materialistic existence and remain engrossed in it or choose the goal of liberation which will give him freedom from the shackles of bondage.

The scriptures have been elucidated and commented upon by the Acharyas and they have all written treatises in their respective traditions giving in succinct form the scriptural teachings. The glory of the tradition of Adi Sankara lies in its teaching of attaining liberation while living in the world. Among the works Sankara has written, the Tattvabodha is a prose work giving the quintessence of Vedanta.

Sankara in this work mentions that the two factors of self-effort and Divine grace must go hand in hand for success in any human enterprise. One cannot replace the other. Without making any effort one cannot bank on Providence to achieve something. Likewise God's grace is necessary to bring our efforts to fruition.

June 18, 1996

Scriptural study ensures God's grace 2.20

One of the best methods to please God and win His grace is to learn the Vedas, which are His revelations as they describe His supreme power. The Vedas clearly indicate what constitutes righteousness and what are the acts prohibited. When transmitted orally by a master to a disciple when he (the latter) is young, the contents of the Vedas remain indelible in his memory. The Vedas reveal not only knowledge about God's compassionate qualities making the scholar who masters them to get himself engaged in divine service but will also provide material gains. More significant is that Vedic study will enable a person who has memorised its various branches to realise that he cannot act according to his own desires

and that nothing can happen without His guidance and approval.

While the Ramayana itself is a text that propagates the message of the Vedas and how to uphold the teachings therein, two instances have been specified by Valmiki to bring out the superior status given to them. As He was preparing to leave the capital to spend 14 years in the forest Rama donated all His property and belongings. At that time He said, "Here are many celibate pupils who learn the recensions of the Vedas and they do nothing else the day long, being wholly devoted to the Vedas and too tired of anything else. Give them provisions and other requirements. A large number of students who have completed their studies are waiting on My mother's pleasure to provide them with the largesse they need."

Likewise, on the death of Ravana, his brother Vibhishana eulogises his great qualities and extols his Vedic knowledge and other attainments. But he refused to conduct his brother's obsequies because, in spite of all his merits, he had yielded to passion and lust, and had committed a heinous crime (of abducting Sita).

The Jeeyar Swami of Ahobila Math in an address to school students urged them to equip themselves with Vedic knowledge also, Referring to certain classics and poems, the Swami explained how Vedic scholars, by virtue of their reluctance to be lured by worldly gains and their stoic attitude, might not be considered wise, since all their attention would be riveted on Divine service and engaged in godly activities only. The spiritual power gained was utilised only for executing the Divine directives in the Vedas because they were firm in their view that God would be with those who obey His orders. Emperor Dasarata who ruled the country efficiently

for several years had one desire in his life that remained unfulfilled. He wanted to 'create' one 'non-believer' in God and one 'unlettered person', reminding us of the worth of acquiring Divine knowledge and maintaining spiritual discipline.

December 5, 1996

Eternal truths of the Upanishads 3.1

The Upanishads breathe the pure fragrance of perennially fresh dialogues between earnest truth seekers and outstanding spiritual teachers. There is a great significance in the lofty and sublime utterances of sages, described as "Mahavakyas". Statements like "Tarati Sokam Atmavit" meaning that the knower of the Atma crosses over to the other shore beyond all sorrow, echo the characteristic Vedantic note, common to all Upanishads, that life is a perpetual flow of impermanences and that the destiny of the soul lies in the tranquil haven of true self-knowledge. The emphasis is not merely on sorrow or suffering, which is ephemeral, but mainly on the prospect of redemption which is real.

In his lecture Prof. K.Seshadri referred to the Prasthanathraya and dwelt on the Upanishads and Brahmasutras, highlighting the uniqueness of the structure and architectonic pattern of the latter. showing how both are intimately interwoven, and revealing the synthesis of their logic with the spiritual intuition. The extreme brevity and cryptic character of the Sutras makes it necessary for a whole world of commentarial literature to be built around the text (of the Sutras). What the Upanishads offer in the first flush of immediate revelation is presented in the Brahmasutras, between themselves, the Brahmasutras and the Upanishads integrate reason and intuition and reconcile the apparently incompatible claims of overt action and mystical absorption.

October 4, 1975

Need to eschew desire for wealth 3.2

The lure of money may drive a person crazy to the point of flouting all norms of ethics and risking his self-respect, reputation and even life. A moment of reflection will reveal that it is the source of agony and mental unrest. One has to toil a great deal to earn money and the troubles do not cease there. How the rich spend sleepless nights worrying about the ways of safeguarding what they have acquired is common knowledge. The pleasures which money can buy are not only effervescent but inferior to what one can get by devoting oneself to the Supreme Being. In the end also, only misery results. Thus, by any account, it is not worthwhile to go chasing after wealth. Unless the mind is weaned away from the mammon, it will be impossible for an individual to concentrate on God. Hence desire for wealth is considered to be an impediment to God-realisation and one is advised to get over it by developing Vairagya. One should learn to be content with whatever wealth one has been blessed with and destined to enjoy, as a consequence of one's past deeds.

The very first sloka in Isavasya, deemed to be basic to the ten Upanishads for which commentaries have been written, highlights the need to exchew desire for wealth which stands in the way of perceiving God. The Lord is all pervading though not visible. As Prahlada told Hiranyakasipu, there is nothing in which He is not present. With unswerving conviction, he asserted that the Lord existed in the very word of Hiranyakasipu denying His existence, pointed out Sri Tirukallam Narasimha-raghavachariar in a discourse.

The Upanishads, constituting the Gnana Kanda, are as vital to the Vedas as the eyes are to the human body. While the Karma Kanda speaks of rituals intended to propitiate the Almighty, the Gnana Kanda eulogises Him exclusively.

Though Isavasya is in the former part it is reckoned among the books dealing with knowledge (Gnana)

December 13, 1975

Brahman is incomprehensible 3.3

While the real nature of the Brahman (the Infinite and the Absolute) is almost impossible to be assessed by mortals, the next best alternative is to take steps to acquire the requisite knowledge to understand His traits, through the help of a qualified spiritual guide who alone will be able to reveal to one the path of Enlightenment. The Supreme Being is broadly said to possess five attributes, Sathyam, Gnanam, Anantham, Anandam and Vimalam. God is the Reality and He is self effulgent. He is not governed by the Laws of Limitations and not measured by time and space. He is Omnipresent, immortal and ever pure. The Kenopanishad cites how the celestials who once defeated the demons, displayed extraordinary vanity, forgetting that their success was only due to God's help. When a spirit (Yaksha) appeared before them, the Devas deputed Agni and Vayu to find out who he was. When the monstrous creature threw a blade of grass in front of them, neither the God of Fire could ignite it nor the God of Wind move it by an inch. When Indra approached him, he vanished. Parvathi who substituted him, explained to them that he was the Supreme Being with whose powers alone, they had achieved victory.

Sri Tirukkallam Narashimharaghavacharya in a discourse said Kenopanishad, containing eternal truths and revelations, opens with a dialogue between a disciple and a teacher on

an inquiry about Brahman. The latter described the Infinite as one who cannot be seen, nor felt nor heard nor apprehended by mind or sense. An individual who realised his incapacity to probe into the mysteries of Brahman's existence alone is wise. Once this real knowledge that God is incomprehensible dawned upon him, he will be enabled to commence his spiritual pursuits.

December 15, 1975

Real intention of Upanishads 3.4

Constantly battered by baffling problems, it is understandable that a man gets disconsolate and wants to run away from this world, least aware that this is not the way to escape from them. He will not be concerned by the frustrating experience if he realises that he has no independence of his own and that there is an unseen Divine force that guides his destiny. He is like a bullock yoked to the cart, the nose-string held from behind. The animal never complains of any discomfort even should there be some but goes on with its job. If a person adopts this attitude that all his acts are God-ordained and carries out his tasks unmindful of the hazards and as a dedication to the Almighty, he will not feel the burden.

When he is asked to discard desire, it is possible to mistake the Hindu philosophy as being negative in its approach. But the real intention of the Upanishad's injunction is to make us remain absolutely contended with what has been provided and not feel dissatisfied with what has not been granted but possessed by others. The desire for an object again depends on the attitude - for instance, akin to the view held by a

child when looking at a charming woman and that of a youth. In just two words, the two vistas to reach Godhead have been described by Vivekananda - pravritti and nivritti margas - broadly indicating the duties to be performed here in this life and the steps to be taken to become spiritually enlightened through study of texts to serve hereafter in the Kingdom of God. In the midst of one's daily activities, one can still uphold the rules of righteousness, perform worship and take to meditation but dedicating the fruits to God. There is no need to seek total renunciation.

Sri Agnihotram Ramanuja Thathachariar in his discourse said what an aspirant should essentially know is the difference between the Atma (soul) and the Sareera (body) and that the sufferings were at the physical plane only. 'If he refuses to get himself deeply involved in material affairs, the ties will get automatically loosened and he will experience Bliss''. The Bhagavatham describes the manner by which a devotee could get himself released from the wordly coils and the episodes of emperors Rishabavahana and Jadabharata prove this point.

April 4, 1978

How to shake off the dust on the soul 3.5

Most of us do know the acts prohibited by scriptural injunctions and realise the consequences of committing them. However, despite our endeavour to keep off from them, we allow ourselves to wallow in the slush of sins.

Our determination fails when temptation wields its sway. This superior power which leads to the wrong path is the

result of the predominance of the quality called "Rajas". It kindles the desire that lurks within us to boldly defy the rules. Desire in any form and lust in particular is fierce, formidable and insatiable. When man is not able to possess what he wants, a mood of frustration sets in and furious over his disappointments he will be prepared to indulge in any crime to obtain what he wants. Like the blazing fire, desire consumes the soul and prevents the ardour to seek Divine Love. The inner vision of man is obscured even as the flame is enveloped by smoke, the mirror covered by a thin layer of dust and the foetus is wrapped by the uterus. Man's anxiety should be to rub off the dust that has settled on the soul. A true knowledge of the real nature of God and of the inter-relationship of the Cosmic and fallen souls will enable one to shake-off this yoke. Prescribed duties should be performed in a spirit of dedication and renunciation.

Sri Narasimharaghavachariar referred to Lord Krishna's explanation for man's above predicament. Man gets into the stranglehold of desire since he is not able to control the senses. Intellect has also been replaced by ignorance. These three are the abodes of the foes - lust and anger. Even as a thief enters the house easily if the doors and windows are kept open and steals the property after switching off the lights, the evil tendencies gain access when the senses are not checked and intellect blurred. Practice of various rites and austerities and adopting the means suggested in spiritual texts would help a person to subdue them. The Katopanishad explains the impermanence of all that have been created. What lies beyond man's final journey in the world is to be understood. In the presence of God in Heaven, the devotee who by treading any of the paths shown by the Vedas, can enjoy Bliss and Peace.

December 29, 1980

Worst sinner can also reach God: How? 3.6

A doubt that often arises in the mind of even a devout person is whether, in view of the enormity of misdeeds committed by him, he can approach the Almighty and whether he will be embraced by Him. Scriptures, however, assure the devotee that even the worst sinner can cross the ocean of grief with the help of the canoe- "Transcendental Knowledge (Jnana)". Even as a blazing fire burns a dried piece of wood into ashes in a trice, the flame of Knowledge can wipe out all his sins. The steps to acquire this Knowledge are: loving homage to God, service at His feet and philosophic inquiry about the Self and the Supreme and their relationship. He who goes through the spiritual discipline carrying out his daily chores in a spirit of dedication, remaining in the world and yet out of its, is sure to experience the Divine Bliss.

While the devotee should certainly feel concerned about the void between him and God, as the latter possesses inimitable traits, he should not forget one of these most admirable qualities of the Supreme Being - His limitless compassion and His easy accessibility. The most abandoned sinner can seek His grace because of this mercy termed "Sowlabhyam". What God expects of him is that he should refrain from doing acts which He dislikes and perform only those which will gladden His heart. The two are broadly classified as "Sins" (Papam) and "Moral Good" (Punyam).

Sri. T. Narasimharaghavachariar cited the Kathopanishad which dwells on the ways to abstain from indulging in deeds considered sinful. If the body can be likened to a chariot, the horses. which draw it are the "Senses" (Indriyas). Using the intellect as the reins, the mind (Charioteer) can control its gallop and steer the occupant through a safe journey,

taking him to the destination. God has endowed every person with three faculties - thinking, speaking and acting. He can put them to proper use and subdue the mind. He will come to realise the presence of God within himself - seated in the heart in an atomic form.

January 2, 1981

Mind can be man's friend or foe 3.7

The mind is man's intimate friend or inveterate foe and hence, according to circumstances, he can swim or sink in the ocean of life. To him who has mastered the art of conforming himself to discipline, the mind can be a good companion. But if he becomes a slave to it and obeys it command, it will prove to be an enemy.

By meditation, abstraction and retraction, the mind can be made steady. All of us do realise how the mind behaves, but many of us find it difficult to control it and so fail to resist the temptations. To guard against getting involved in wordly enjoyments, it should be reined with great effort and chained to the intellect. For this, one should conduct himself in life properly, mould his character and learn the relationship of the soul and the body and the soul and the Supreme Being. A royal road has been laid by God Himself for the aspirant to reach His Kingdom, but man guided by the mind seeks to go through the by-lanes and incidentally gets lost.

In gaining true knowledge about the nature of God, the individual should seek clarifications from a qualified spiritual leader. Why not acquire the same through the plethora of

scriptural texts, one may ask. Knowledge so secured may end in a man getting confused, as the contents require proper commentary. The Kathopanishad hence, pleads with man to rise from his slumber and be ever awake till he reaches his journey's end. Sri Tirukkallam Narasimharaghavachariar said.

One who has controlled his mind will see God everywhere and in everything and will not be perturbed by mundane opposites - love and hatred, heat or cold, happiness or misery, honour or dishonour and respect or disrespect. He will treat a clod of clay, a lump of potsherds and a brick of gold alike, knowing that all are but variations of earth's form. By his surrender at God's feet and entrusting himself thus, he can win God's confidence and acquire the power to put his intellect to proper use. If one obeys God's commands, he will secure the release from bondage. With external purity and continence, one should resort to meditation; he will be able to get rid of the evil of illusion that blurs his vision.

January 5, 1981

Spiritual wisdom needed to realise God 3.8

One of the essential requirements of a devotee who desires to get released from bondage and seeks to realise God, is the acquisition of spiritual knowledge. A devotee should understand the nature of the object to be achieved, viz, the Supreme Being, the nature of the Self, their relationship, the means to reach God, the result that comes out of his efforts and the obstacles which prevent him from reaching his goal. The sources for this wisdom are "Pratyaksha" or

perception, seeing actually what happens around through senses. "Anumana", inference based on precedents and thirdly, the "Verbal Authority" or the trustworthy utterances. They reveal what the devotee cannot comprehend.

Among them are the Vedas and the Upanishads (termed Srutis) and the codes of Manu, Yagnavalkya and Parasara, the Ithihasas, the Puranas and the Brahma Sutras (called Smritis) Besides these are the Agamas. According to one of the Agamas, God can be conceived in five forms, one of them being as "idols", enabling the devotee to offer his worship. The scriptural texts refer to the two methods to get rid of the punishment for his past misdeeds and to obtain Salvation - Bhakti and Prapatti - the paths of Devotion and self-surrender. When a person's Karma is destroyed by one of these two steps, God becomes pleased and waives the punishment.

Sri Tirukkallam Narasimharaghavachariar in his discourse referred to the accessories needed for a person to resort to "Surrender", the determination to do only those acts which would receive God's approbation avoidance of deeds which would incur His displeasure; intense Faith that He would stand as his saviour; his plaint of helplessness that he has no capacity to save himself and the offer of sincere prayers to the Lord requesting him to extend His assurance of protection.

Bodily purity, freedom from harbouring evil thoughts, performance of prescribed rites with zeal, goodwill to all (even to enemies) and contentment, are some of the virtues he should cultivate.

March 16, 1981

Immortality for those who seek truth 3.9

Both the "good" and the "pleasant" approach a man. The wise one discriminates between the two and having examined them, prefers the former while others choose the latter. The good and the pleasant represent the paths of spiritual knowledge and of sense pleasures. It is the deluded who take recourse to the latter. These remarks formed the base for the dissertation given by the Lord of Death (Yama) on what happens to life when it ceases. The Mahabharata states that death and immortality are established in this body. One gets mortality by pursuing illusion while immortality is assured to those who seek Truth. Another verse says that a father should treat his child, up to the age of five, with deep affection; between five and 15 induct discipline and then treat him as a companion. The two factors mentioned above are termed "Sreyas" and "Preyas".

In a lecture, Swami Ranganadananda said Kathopanishad, the most popular among the Upanishads containing ancient wisdom, has philosophy, mysticism and useful imageries put together. The message of the Upanishads is that we should develop fearlessness and moral strength. They recognise human freedom and dignity and call upon everyone to assert his or her Divine status. The Kathopanishad exhorts every human being not to be a creature. "Do not remain a cattle of the Gods". It commences with the story of a young man who asked his father, who was making a generous gift of cows, as to whom he (the boy) is going to be "donated". Annoyed at his pestering, the father said "I shall give you to Death". The youth implicitly obeyed the command and waited at the doorsteps of Yama's abode and was welcomed. Two of his boons-to cause his father's anger to disappear and to teach how to reach heaven were granted. His third query was that when a man dies, some say "everything is finished" while

some believe that "something remains". Which is correct? Yama who was disinclined to enlighten him on this "profound mysticism", tempted him by offering wealth and other pleasures to make him desist from asking this question. But the boy was adamant and was keen only on getting an explanation for his doubt-what lies after death and whether there is anything changeless in this world of change. Then the Lord of Death started detailing him the mystery.

January 14, 1987

Upanishads show the way to reach God 3.10

The study of various scriptural texts is essentially to make a person virtuous and God-centred. He is asked to beware of pleasures which will push him deep down into the valley of agony. The Vedic utterances are in the nature of revelations of the Supreme force which controls the entire universe. The first segment of the Vedas deals with rites and ceremonies to be observed while the latter details the steps to acquire spiritual knowledge through the Upanishads.

Adi Sankara defines the Upanishads as those which reveal the Truth to enable a person to get rid of his grief. They describe God as all-pervading, radiant, transcendental and compassionate. They are the cream of ancient wisdom, categorically proclaiming the omnipresence of God. Ignorant persons often raise the question whether God can be seen and if not, why?

Gold, gems and precious metals are hidden in the ground

but they cannot be acquired easily. They can be located only with certain aids. Subsoil water can be traced only by divining. So too, God's resplendent vision can be seen through "devotion". Those who have cultivated this assiduously will certainly experience the presence of God.

The Upanishads point out, Sri Manjakkudi Rajagopala Sastrigal said in a discourse, that God declines to be near those who are immersed in wordly pleasures and who are not concerned about the life hereafter. God is close to those who obey His commands, who discharge their ordained duties and dedicate their acts to Him.

Several people are eager to secure salvation to avoid rebirths. What entitles an aspirant to obtain it depends on two factors-implicit obedience of the directives prescribed in the Vedas and equal anxiety not to indulge in misdeeds which are prohibited in the scriptural literature.

Practice of various austerities and adopting the measures suggested in the sacred texts will help a person to subdue the senses. The factors which lure them can be traced to the surroundings in which a person is placed, his association with men lacking character and his closeness with certain undesirable objects.

July 2, 1990

Importance of developing devotion 3.11

The Hindu Scriptural literature, particularly the Upanishads deal not only with metaphysics but ethics and

religion also, pointing out how man should know what he ought to do and what many hope for and also offering solutions, which, when followed will be soul satisfying. Various textual authorities provide us with a complete chart of tackling every fundamental problem and teach us the doctrines as regards the nature of God, Man and the World and the relationship between them. One of them spells out two paths that are laid before us - one to gain ephemeral pleasures which will entangle human beings in worldly activities (Preya) and the other, teaching Divine wisdom, enabling to cut asunder, the knots of worldly bondage (Sreya). Those who are fortunate will take recourse to Sreya whereas those who are devoid of any spiritual merit and without any pious disposition will tread Preya and will naturally be deprived of spiritual gain.

The Upanishads proclaim: "Arise and Awake, approach a preceptor and learn from him about the means of God-realisation". The Upanishads have been described as the deep, still, mountain tarns, fed from the pure waters of the everlasting snows, lit by clear sunshine or by night, mirroring the high serenity of the stars. In one of them, eight traits of the Soul have been mentioned devoid of sinful links with ignorance (want of true conception of the Self); freedom from aging; from death; no affliction for loss of desired objects; without any longing for food or enjoyment; no hankering after any material object; adherence to Truth and capable of achieving anything.

Swami Yati Maharaj, Chief of Gaudiya Math, in a discourse said, individuals in bondage will be naturally inclined to indulge in material enjoyment and hardly one among them will possess the inquisitiveness to reach Divinity. So long as there is no awakening of devotion, one has to undergo rebirths and experience endless suffering. The highest gain in human existence is to approach God through devotion. The Kathopanishad says that God is free from any inauspiciousness. He is the store-

house of all that is good. Srimad Bhagavatham adds: listening with rapt attention to soul-enlivening narrations of the Supreme Being from the lips of devotees gives rise to unshakable faith in God, removing forthwith evil propensities from the heart and giving scope for developing a deep desire to realise Him.

December 18, 1990

Spirituality is service of man 3.12

"It is good for us to see that the animal within us dies so that the man within us can live", is a profound statement by a modern scientist. Man becomes man only when he is able to rise beyond life in the five senses, Until this century, Science believed that through the senses alone, reality could be investigated and apprehended. The truth discovered through sense perception were considered unchallengeable. But the cocksureness is gone today. Biologists, especially, have started thinking at another level.

For long, evolution was organic. Progress was marked by species developing new, more complicated organs. But with the appearance of man, a revolution has taken place. The growth in man is marked not by new organs but by changes in his psyche. An animal is governed by instincts, but men, by values. Human evolution is the story of man's search for values. The world of the senses can give us the comforts and facilities that characterise consumerism, but not the eternal values that enrich the soul. This has been clearly stressed by the Upanishads, which speak of two types of knowledge, the "relative" and the "absolute". When sage Narada approached Sanatkumara for instruction, the latter asked him what he

knew already. Narada reeled off an impressive list of 18 sciences he had mastered. Sanatkumara pointed out that these constitute only the relative. The "absolute" is that by which the Imperishable is attained.

Swami Ranganadananda in a lecture said, our misery results because of identifying ourselves with the body. The first step in spiritual discipline is transcending the body consciousness. Our instinct is to be selfish. In social and political life we see how selfishness rules the roost. Sri Ramakrishna, whose life was a veritable spiritual laboratory wherein he personally tested and revalidated the Upanishadic dicta, speaks of the 'unripe ego' and the 'ripe ego'. The former is the 'selfish gene' which has consideration only for itself - and Devil taking. The ripe ego, on the contrary, is a refined one, which has expanded in unselfishness and cares for the others. Real spirituality consists not in conventional piety but in the readiness to be of service to fellowmen, not minding personal inconvenience and sacrifice.

March 25, 1992

Inner peace is essence of life 3.13

The universe is vast but vaster is the world within. Science probes nature but the Vedanta (science of total human potentialities) continues the search inwards. It seeks the ultimate, imperishable reality that is not affected by space, time and casuality. In this inward life, there are two main streams - knowledge and devotion - which follow different paths but finally they merge. As Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa had said, pure devotion and pure knowledge were not distinct. One led to the other. The Bhagavad Gita affirms that the two paths are like the left and right eyes. Both are needed for proper vision.

The Chandogya Upanishad, which describes the process of "knowledge", says: if what goes into us - material food as well as mental pabulum - is pure, the mind turns pure, the wisdom steadies and right knowledge dawns. Then all complexities vanish and the individual experiences total freedom and joy. Boys and girls should be encouraged to self-reliance. Physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual strength should be instilled in them.

Swami Ranganadananda in a lecture said the scriptures emphasised devotion, which was natural to us because the ability to love was innate and did require a sharp intellect. Among the techniques of 'Bhakti', repeating the Lord's sacred names is the easiest and most rewarding. The Bhagavatam says that when Krishna's name is chanted, all impurities in our hearts are wiped out. In pure devotion, avarice, pride and lust disappear. The mind turns serene and one becomes disinterested. These steps of devotion direct one along the path of knowledge. "I do not consider one a Hindu, unless one is spiritual" said Swami Vivekananda. Many believe that spiritual life is only for the aged, but in truth, it is for all who look for harmony. Tension and conflict, hatred and frustration, greed and jealously are unnatural. The natural life is when the spirit flows smoothly, in peace.

April 3, 1993

Simple and yet profound Upanishads 3.14

The Upanishads, which constitute the end-portions of the eternal Vedas, inquire into the nature and description of the absolute "Reality" (God).

The subjects dealt with therein are means to cross the ocean of transmigration. The method adopted by the seers to state the facts and convey the message is unique. To enable the earnest student to comprehend these profound but sometimes recondite statements, the "story" has been chosen as the medium. The seers, proficient in psychology, had insight into man's interests, his capacity to digest profound truths and his inclination to be guided by simple directives conveyed through stories.

The contents of the Upanishads have thus been simple narratives like sugar-coated pills. Even as medicine enters the stomach without it being aware of the bitter taste, the sublime instructions couched in the form of the stories, enable the sincere inquirer to get at the problems and their solutions in this life-journey. The aim of all the Upanishads is to show humanity, the path of liberation and the ultimate bliss. The attainment of bliss is not possible by a mere perusal of scriptures. The stories and their esoteric significance are to be learnt through spiritual guides. Reflecting on such teachings will culminate in subjective experience.

One of the stories refers to a scholar who first refuses to transmit spiritual knowledge to a king but later conveys it to him. Was he carried away by the blandishments of the king? No, said Sri Ganapathi Satchidananda Swami in a message. Impressed and satisfied with the zeal and ardent faith shown by the king, the sage changed his views. Lord Krishna in the Gita says "He who is full of faith attains knowledge".

The king (Janasruti) was famed for his benevolent administration. One summer night when he was enjoying the cool breeze, reclining on his couch on the terrace of his palace, he heard two swans praising the knowledge of a sage called Raikva. The next day, the king asked his men to trace the sage, who was ultimately found in a village, Far from being impressive, the sage's body was full of sores and scabies.

The king, who was keen on learning meditation from the sage, offered him chariots, cows, jewellery and other material wealth. Raikva rejected them but, on seeing the king's real interest, initiated him. A king may be deeply respected in his country but a Divine personality (scholar) will be revered at all places.

December 2, 1993

Self-realisation gives everlasting bliss 3.15

The source of the highest joy lies within every one of us. Without realising this truth man searches for happiness in the material world seeking fulfilment in sense pleasures which give only temporary satisfaction. Many of us do not in the first place believe that true bliss can be discovered only in the realisation of our Self and not in worldly objects.

Like a businessman who does not get any return from his investment realises that he must take steps to increase his profits and acts accordingly, a wise man understands the futility of a life given only to the pursuit of material ends and takes steps to progress spiritually. Those who follow the dictates of their desires without utilising their intellect and will for self-improvement will only get further enmeshed in bondage.

That human life is meant only to realise the highest bliss of the Self, becomes clear, when the ephemeral nature of material life gets firmly ingrained in the mind. Approaching a Guru for guidance is very essential to progress spiritually because there are innumerable pitfalls on the path which can be surmounted only with Guru's grace.

By the performance of our actions as duty, without attachment, the mind becomes purified of baser qualities life selfishness, thus becoming fit to receive subtle spiritual knowledge. Even worldly ends can be achieved only with concentration of mind but if we have to derive spiritual benefit from our actions we must act with detachment. So what is required is only a different orientation to life, clearly understanding our goal.

In his lecture on the Kenopanishad, Swami Gautamananda said, the awareness that we are essentially spiritual and not the body must be constantly reinforced mentally. This Upanishad opens with an invocation for physical well being. One may rightly wonder why, when the subject matter of the Upanishad is about the supreme infinite consciousness it opens on a different note. Here it is very essential to understand that the body is the instrument to realise the Divine and hence must be fit to pursue this objective.

January 6, 1996

The teachings of the Ramayana 4.1

The greatness of the Ramayana is clearly described in a verse which says that when the Paramapurusha, proclaimed by the Vedas, was born as the son of Dasaratha, Vedas also made their appearance in the form of the Ramayana, composed by Valmiki. This gives rise to the questions, what are the contents of the Vedas and what are their purpose? The Vedas contain mantras or hymns for the performance of a variety of karmas, from birth to death, including several yagas, Ishtis and homas and also for conducting ceremonies for regaining lost health, getting over troubles caused by enemies,and the like. Though the Vedas contain a variety of such topics, being encyclopaedic in their range, they reveal to us, according to the Upanishads, the existence of one and only Supreme God, the Paramatma.

Through a process of intense discipline, we must train our mind to develop equipoise, so that it will remain unaffected by pain or pleasure. Like water-drops on a lotus leaf, sorrows will not affect such persons. This state of perfection of mind achieved by a person is known as Yoga. Though the common meaning of Yoga is the bringing together of a number of materials or influences, the philosophic meaning is Viyogam, or cutting away from attachment.

Having realised the true form of the Atma, a person does not think of anything else more profitable to achieve. A person in that state of realisation is least bothered by even the greatest of what appear as calamities. That state of perfection is Yoga, which has to be practised with determination of purpose and a steady mind. It is only through a process

of discipline that the mind can be cleansed of all impurities and trained to be steady and to develop the capacity of single-pointed concentration. That every person should, through proper education and discipline, attain the state of Yoga described above, before the soul departs from the body, is indicated by Kalidasa in his Raghuvamsa. We must be able to die with a smile on our lips. For, if we die without weeping, we will not have to weep after we die, that is, we will have no rebirth thereafter.

The Vedas are the source of Dharma. Sri Rama was the upholder and embodiment of Dharma. He protected it by his mental courage and disciplined life. Therefore, when he left for the forest for fourteen years to honour the pledge given by his father to Kaikeyi, his mother Kausalya offered him as a talisman the very Dharma which he protected, so that Dharma may in turn protect him from all harms.

That is how the Tamil saying "Dharmam talai kaakum", came in vogue. If a dog should protect us from thieves, we must take good care of it. Similarly, Dharma will protect us only when we take care of it. Sri Rama has become, therefore, a model for us all. He was endowed with patience and a calm mind. When a strong and powerful person sticks to the right path, he becomes a model for others. Sivaji, through the influences of his guru, Ramadas, used his strength and power only in the right manner. For instance, when women belonging to his enemies fell into his hands as prisoners, during his battles, he took great care of them and restored them to their relations unharmed.

The Ramayana teaches us the essential principles of the Vedas. Any superior scripture is generally called "Veda" and no wonder the Ramayana has come to be revered as Vedas. The Parama-purusha spoken of in the Vedas is perfect and full embodiment of Dharma, and is Sri Rama of the Ramayana.

The epic instructs us in karma, bhakti, and jnana, and in the Dharmic way of life. If we keep before ourselves the ideal of Sri Rama, we will be able to tide over every difficulty and danger and will be saved from straying into evil path. Sri Rama Naama smarana is the sure succour in life's tribulations. Anjaneya who practised the japa of this Taaraka Mantra to perfection, is the embodiment of brahmacharya and valour, which are the most needed to endow us with strength to successfully go through the voyage of life. If we are anchored in Sri Rama and His supreme devotee, Sri Anjaneya, our mind will not be sullied by kaama or other passions, but will be disciplined to attain the reality pointed out by the Vedas.

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi

Foundation for Valmiki Ramayana 4.2

Strict adherence to the principles of righteous conduct enjoined by the Vedas is the prime duty of every individual. Wealth and status should not be allowed to stand in the way of fulfilling that obligation. The epics are but annotations on the norms of Justice delineated in the Shastras, containing as they do instances of persons who attained exalted status by rigid observance of Dharmam against great odds and of those who were doomed because they defied the code. At a time when people were becoming increasingly indifferent to the ethical axioms, God Himself assumed human form as Sri Rama, upheld the greatness of Dharmam and showed, by example, that the path of righteousness was not impossible to tread.

Sri Anantarama Dikshitar and Sri Narayana Dikshitar of Sengalipuram, said the highest felicity attainable by man is to perceive God in one's inner Self. Constant association with the virtuous, incessant utterance of God's auspicious names and listening to the dissertations of His Divine exploits in His various incarnations - these have been accepted by the learned as the sure and easy methods of attaining that sublime happiness especially in this Kali Yuga. With their abundant mercy, the Sadhus would correct a wrong-doer and turn him to the right path. Both the Ganga and the Sadhus had the power to wash away one's sins. Whereas one should take a dip in the sacred river observing certian formalities, a mere look by the Sadhus would serve the purpose. This is because, while the Ganga had come away from the lotus feet of Sri Narayana where it originated, the Sadhus have permanently enshrined the Lord's feet in their hearts by deep meditation and prayer.

Though Valmiki was himself quite conversant with the story of Sri Rama, he wanted to get it through an Acharya. When Sage Narada, the Divine preceptor, came to his hermitage, the poet posed the question who was an ideal man - a repository of all virtues with no defect. The answer came from Narada in the form of Samkshepa Ramayanam which formed the foundation on which the magnificent 24,000 verse edifice was built by Valmiki. In fact, Narada, having chosen Valmiki as the competent person to write the epic, was wondering how to request him to take up the work. So, he felt profoundly relieved and happy when the poet himself came out with the question.

May 10, 1966

God's compassion illustrated from Ramayana 4.3

When a tank is full and there is incessant downpour, the sluice gate should be lifted to ensure safety of the embankment. A repository of innumerable and inimitable traits, there is no opportunity for God to reveal them in His own celestial abode. This purpose is achieved through incarnations when He demonstrates to the world their application to enable people to follow these noble characteristics. Sri Rama's exemplary qualities are projected at every turn in the Ramayanam, such as forgiveness, magnanimity, goodwill, compassion, suavity, gentleness, easy accessibility and patience.

In his discourse Sri P.B. Annangaracharya cited two examples of God's generosity and nobility which outshone others When Sugriva wept over Vali's death, the Lord too sat dazed for quite some time When Ravana was beaten on the battle-field and when he stood totally disarmed, Sri Rama could have killed him but He permitted him to go back to his palace and return the next day refreshed and well-equipped.

Though Sri Rama tried to hide His identity, yet, at the very commencement of the epic, Sage Viswamitra declared that God's incarnation was patently visible. His very actions reflected that He was the Supreme Being and the Almighty. With His extraordinary powers. He could have wiped out the Rakshasa tribe in a trice but He staged a Divine drama, undergoing sufferings even as a human being would experience. His gesture towards a true devotee is brought out in His not only welcoming Vibhishana to His fold but even complying with his suggestion to seek the help of the King of the Ocean to reach Lanka. Sri Rama also indirectly spells out the

essential requisites of "Saranagathi" that one should declare himself utterly helpless and dedicate every act to God.

February 8, 1968

Simplicity of the Doctrine of Surrender 4.4

The effective manner by which any sinner can escape God's displeasure will be a genuine demonstration of his repentance. His open expression of regret for his past misdeeds should be in the form of an "Anjali" - offer of prayer by raising his folded palms as a sign of abject surrender. The Doctrine of Refuge can be put into practice by any individual, irrespective of his status or birth, at any time and in whatever manner possible for him. The penitent should lay down his sins at the feet of God, obtain initiation from a spiritual leader, give an assurance that he would never commit any wrong knowingly and that he would strictly follow the rules of conduct for a virtuous life. One who had thus surrendered, would be rewarded on the spot. Vibhishana is portrayed as the most ardent devotee who had achieved success by taking recourse to this simple method and obtaining asylum from Sri Rama. The Doctrine had been extensively dealt with by Sri Vedanta Desika in his works.

In his discourse Sri K.V. Santhanagopalachariar said discarding his kith and kin and wealth, Vibhishana rushed to the Lord fully confident that he would be welcomed into His fold. Praising His traits of compassion and benevolence, he urged that the Lord's consent for protection might be extended forthwith, lest his fickle mind should change its

decision. Sri Rama Himself was the ultimate authority to grant him succour but He consulted the top leaders of the monkey legion who, however with the exception of Anjaneya, expressed grave doubts about Vibhishana's sincerity, suspecting him to be a spy. Though the majority wanted a cautious approach, Sri Rama rejected their opinion and took the advice of Anjaneya as it was based on the sound principles of righteousness.

January 9, 1969

Everlasting bliss at the end of royal road 4.5

Whatever may be a person's academic distinctions, he cannot, by his wisdom and self-education alone understand the import of the several doctrines and the purport of numerous incantations, embedded in the sacred works. Such an attempt may even lead to a confusion of his thoughts. It requires a spiritual teacher to unravel the mysteries and explain why several restrictions have been placed even in the matter of religious pursuits. For instance, Valmiki says the life of one who has not seen Sri Rama or on whom the Lord has not showered His grace, is not worth living. Is it then possible to have a vision of Sri Rama? Answering in the affirmative, Thyagaraja (in his songs "Apparamabhakti" and "Chakkanirajamargamu") says if one treads the royal road of devotion, without anticipating immediate returns, there is bound to be everlasting Bliss. Sri Rama will protect His devotees like the eyelids safeguarding the cornea, enabling them to conquer the three foes within, the uncontrollable mind, the impure body and ignorance. Short-cut methods to seek Divine blessings are there no doubt, but they are like bylanes.

In his discourse Sri, T.S. Balakrishna Sastrigal said if Anjaneya's glory was being sung even now, it was because of his intimate association with Sri Rama. While all his comrades were assessing their strength, he was steeped in meditation. Backed by the courage that the Lord was with him, he leapt across the ocean to land in Lanka. Distressed at not being able to locate Sri Sita, he envisaged the chain of consequences resulting out of the failure of his mission. He invoked the blessings of Sri Rama and other deities, when it dawned upon him to search Ashokavana, where to his joy, he found the Divine Mother held captive.

February 19, 1971

With God's grace humans can get Divine traits 4.6

Incarnation of God implies His descending from His abode to the world donning the garb of a human being. Why should He adopt this step and what is the necessity are the questions that may be asked. By this, God provides human beings a rare opportunity to rise to the level of Divine creations. God lends a helping hand to lift a sincere person and give him the necessary wherewithal to turn himself into a Divine being. In His incarnation, God demonstrates how this can be achieved. He will act as a human being but will not be susceptible to sentiments, nor be affected by grief or other weaknesses. It is not God's intention to take us directly to Heaven, but He points out that by following the norms He had set in His life, a person can outshine others by developing certain distinguishing Divine traits. No one is born with such outstanding qualities, but in the course of one's life, one can acquire

them. The essential requirements for such a distinction are adherence to the principles of righteousness, respect for Moral Law, reverence to truth and submission to justice.

The Darwin theory of evolution points out how the animals are endowed with five senses and man with six faculties, while the Divine being possess an extraordinary seventh sense. Scriptures mention how a man can lift himself from his ordinary level to that of a Divine being and God, as Sri Rama, gave a practical illustration of reaching this high standard, through the character of Vali. As a beast, he committed the misdeed of terrorising his brother and driving him away, making him desert his wife. But on his being punished by Sri Rama and realising his error and knowing His identity, he turned a human being and owned his fault. By displaying the rare gesture of requesting Sri Rama (while dying) to forgive his brother, Sugriva, should he err, Vali became a Divine being.

Sri Keeran in his discourse said Hanuman gave to posterity, the panacea for all ills in the form of "Rama Nama". He administered the "Tablet of Bhakti" mixed in purified honey (Rama Nama) to get rid of the impurities lurking in a person's mind-ego, anger, hatred malice and greed. Sri Rama, meeting Hanuman for the first time, was struck by his devotion and felt sure that his mission to search Sri Sita would result in success, as He deemed it an auspicious omen to be befriended by a man of sincerity.

October 7, 1977

Ingratitude, worst of sins 4.7

Family heritage, wealth, official position - all these may bring a person into limelight and give him a status in society.

By themselves, these factors cannot contribute to his greatness, though they can afford him a good start. What makes a man immortal are his virtues such as selflessness, compassion, honesty and magnanimity. Outstanding among these noble traits, however, are gratefulness and modesty. The scriptures catalogue a bewildering variety and range of sins which man is liable to commit and also prescribe modes of atonement. The worst of sins is ingratitude. The one who is guilty of this has no salvation. Even a small help received should be remembered for ever and paid back to the extent possible.

As for the other major virtue humility, it is capable of elevating an individual to the stature of a celestial being. To stress the point, Thiruvalluvar asserts that the one who is arrogant will be condemned to perdition. The ego in man manifests itself in the craze for reputation and fanfare of publicity. Sometimes this unwholesome desire may drive a person to self-deception, like stage-managing award of a 'title' for some 'distinction' he has achieved. The more eminent a person is the more modest he should be. Otherwise, his noble traits will not shine. An enlightened soul that Sundaramurthi Swamigal was, he described himself as a humble devotee of the Lord's devotees.

Sri Kripanandavariar, in his discourse said Kambar, in his Ramayana, immortalised the name of Sadayappa, his benefactor, as an expression of his gratitude. The bard's modesty was apparent in more than one place. For instance, even where he could have stated a fact without having to acknowledge it to some body else. Kambar mentioned that he was just repeating what the illustrious sage, Valmiki had stated. Many of the tersely-worded dicta in Thirukkural had been elaborated and embellished by Kambar-just as a son excelled his father in talents.

February 13, 1978

Medical lore that is lost 4.8

Even from the scanty evidence in the scriptural texts still left for posterity, it is easy to infer that valuable information about the advancement of science and technology in ancient days has been lost. There is no trace, for instance, of the treatise on flora termed "Vriksha Sastra" dealing with the medicinal properties of herbs, plants and leaves. There were immediate cures for gashes and grievous injury as also treatment for fractures and dislocations. Occasions demanded, particularly during wars, that wounded soldiers should be attended to and sent to field service back within a few hours to overcome manpower shortage. The arrows which got stuck to the body had to be removed carefully and gushing of blood stopped. They were done with the help of special plants. People who fell unconscious were brought back to normalcy by making them inhale a special type of herb. The battle between Sri Rama and Ravana in the Ramayana gives scope to reflect on the genius of our forbears and the efficacy of Ayurveda. The Brahmastra aimed by Indrajit immobilised the entire monkey legion and also Sri Rama and Lakshmana but the medicines brought by Hanuman worked wonders and all of them were ready again to attack the Ravana warriors. The combat also proved the futility of human being's endeavour to subvert the arrangements made by God. Man has to depend on Divine strength and he cannot function on of his own will. Ravana least expected that the monkeys could face leaders on his side like Kumbakarna and Indrajit. As his plans failed and death stared at him he was reminded about the curse incurred by him for his misconduct.

In his discourse Sri D. Subramania Somayajulu said that no one who followed the path of Righteousness would be

let down by the Supreme Being. This was proved by Lakshmana who released an arrow, swearing in the name of Lord Rama that should He really be the replica of Dharma, the foe should be vanquished. The expected did happen.

March 1, 1978

Three great morals of Ramayana 4.9

Profundity by itself will be meaningless if a person is morally a bankrupt. Non-interference in other people's affairs and no desire to possess the property held by others and to covet wives of others are the three morals culled out from the Ramayana. A tendency exists in a man to prefer the company of women other than his spouse but he should be asked to reflect for a moment and spell out his reaction should a stranger just touch his wife. An incident usually narrated recalls how a rich man visited a friend's house, in his absence, with the sinister motive of seeking the company of his charming wife. To teach him a lesson, the sprightly girl posed as if she welcomed the proposal and invited him to dine but served a meal in which all the dishes were made of the same vegetable. Unable to relish this insipid food, the wealthy person wanted to know the idea behind when she politely reminded him that all women are made of the same mettle while men have a wrong notion that they differ. Sri Sita told Ravana that similar weakness entertained by him would lead to his ruin. A great Vedic scholar, he was lustful and wanted to take Her as his wife in spite of the fact that his numerous wives were beautiful and dutiful. Sri Sita warned him of the consequences of compelling Her. He let out a threat of killing Her, if She failed to yield within a stipulated time. To the

guards who tried to explain to Her of the advantages of marrying Ravana, Sri Sita listed several women like Nalayini, Damayanti, Savithri and Swarchala who had undergone extreme sacrifice to preserve their chastity.

Sri Manjakkudi Rajagopala Sastrigal in his discourse referred to the Vedic mantra by which devotees daily prayed that they should listen and see only good every morning. By pleading one's helplessness to God, one could obtain Divine guidance at the appropriate time. Having failed to locate Sri Sita in the entire island, Anjaneya became dejected but he appealed to God to give him the moral courage when suddenly it dawned on him that he should search the Asokavana. He spotted the Divine Mother there kept in isolation, revealed his identity and provided Her the needed cheer.

April 14, 1978

A hurdle on the pathway to God's kingdom 4.10

In the ancient scheme devised by saints vision for a man's peaceful journey through life, special emphasis was laid on efforts to derive spiritual enlightenment. Tradition did not bar men either from supporting his family or from acquiring material benefits but they were always cautioned to remain detached. Those fired with religious zeal were advised to discard worldly activities after a specified period and resort to exercises which will enable them to reach God's kingdom.

Excessive attachment towards kith and kin will only make them frustrated. The tendency among children is to turn

ungrateful and tell the parents, who might have undergone several privations and sacrifices to bring them up, that their success was only due to their own endeavour. Even the wife may detest her husband if he is in the sick-bed for a long time or if he is stripped of his status or wealth. The man too, if he finds his wife a burden, may get disgusted with her.

The catastrophic consequences of excessive attachment towards family members and worldly possessions have been discussed by Neelakanta Dikshitar, a profound scholar, Pandyan Minister and devotee of Divine Mother, in one of his famous poems. So too are the sentiments in Yagnavalkya's works. Swami Ramakrishna narrates this inherent nature of a person by relating the story of a man who discarded his children and his wife when all of them were crossing a stream but were caught in sudden freshes. After a stage, a person is asked to get rid of his earthly links and meditate on God. The concept of retirement for a man who has been toiling for a number of years for his family arises from this principle.

In his Ramayana discourse, Sri S. Venkatesa Sastrigal referred to emperor Dasaratha's sudden plans to crown Sri Rama. A reminder of his old age made him decide to step down and he was confident of his son's ability. The public welcomed the proposal with tumultous approbation and the stage was set for His coronation when Fate intervened and thwarted the plans. Circumstances led to the Divine prince's banishment.

May 7, 1986

Dissertation on polity 4.11

Those who do not recognise God and refuse to acknowledge His superiority and supreme powers will always try to justify

their stand by putting forth irrelevant examples. They have the capacity to 'hypnotise' people by their arguments and through indoctrination, will attempt to bring them to their fold. Does God paint every crow with black hue? Does He pin the plumes behind the peacock? They deride.

These are but samples of their 'wisdom'. By listening to some of their 'stories', people may also be 'drawn towards them. It is necessary to keep atheists at a distance and should not be given prominence to their denigration. Do you adopt this procedure? asks Lord Rama, as one in the series of questions put to Bharata, while discussing the administrative traits of a ruler. Will it be possible for them to know who keeps the feed ready for the child that is just delivered?

People should be kept contented, the Lord continues in His dissertation on polity. (Part of the Ayodhya Kanda in the Ramayana called 'Kachit Sarga'). A well settled man should feel happy by comparing himself with one who is poorer, instead of meaninglessly multiplying his desires. Likewise, an administrator should not slight the poor or treat the have-nots with contempt because they too may offer sane advice in times of expediency.

The Lord gives a list of persons who hold key positions and who should be kept under surveillance because they may be tempted by enemies. Included in these categories are the guards, sentries, jailors, military commanders who may pass on information about troop movements, those in charge of the Exchequer, public works authorities lest they should cause damage to tanks and irrigation sources and temple trustees, Sri V. Srivatsankachariar explained in his discourse.

An instance is recorded about a king who granted ten measures of paddy to a needy man but the revenue official

in charge, corrupt by nature, mixed a small quantity with clay, stones and added water to make the total of ten. After some days, the poor man told the king indirectly and discreetly through a Sanskrit verse, that he got just one measure, after removing the extraneous ingredients, the chaff and the moisture. The ruler should, however, never punish the prince, his principal adviser or the royal priest because when they chance to come to power, people may not show them the due respect, because of the earlier charges against them. Quiet diplomacy can be adopted by replacing them, without assigning reasons.

January 31, 1987

The Ramayana has lessons for all times 4.12

The Ramayana pervades our cultural life; every character has been presented to the reader in such a way that he or she can mould his or her future in a proper manner. The lessons learnt from them are applicable to all times and to all conditions of life. The hero is the embodiment of virtue, knows His obligations, is firm in executing the vows of protection and combines in Him very many rare qualities. Likewise, the Divine Mother who had manifested as His partner, enabled Him to establish Moral Law.

In portraying Ravana and Soorpanaka, the author of the epic has conveyed the disastrous consequences of falling victims to infatuation. Sister of the former, she was struck by Sri Rama's dazzle and wanted to marry Him. Sri Rama felt that a time had come to cry a halt to her overtures. She did not mind even the presence of Sri Sita by His side. She was duly punished. Likewise, Ravana committed the sin of

separating the Divine couple. Tradition holds that the two should never be worshipped separately. Bharata stands as a symbol of supreme sacrifice and of extreme dispassion. He discarded the kingdom that belonged to Sri Rama but was forced on him and decided to bring Him back. Later, when he ruled it as Sri Rama's representative, he led an austere life, never enjoying power. Anjaneya tested his sincerity and was bewildered by his deep devotion.

In his discourse, Sri Sathyapramoda Thirtha of Uttaradi Math dwelt on the invocatory verse and raised the question how the pronouncement of a curse on the hunter who brought down the male bird when it was sporting with its mate, could be held as a "celebrated" one. But he said, its apparent meaning as embodying a curse was not satisfactory. The Swami split the words in such a manner as to convey the entire narrative in all the chapters.

On the Sundara Kanda, he said, the poet has termed it as "beautiful". The details relating to the sad days spent by the Divine Mother in captivity and the manner in which Anjaneya, as the messenger of the Lord, infused hopes in Her, are marvellously depicted in this chapter.

Being a summary of the Vedas, the reading of the Ramayana will fetch secular benefactions and will destroy the evil forces lurking within us. It is a book of perennial philosophy and if a listener has the ability to discern the inner meanings properly, he will be compelled to observe the code of pious conduct and prosper in life.

May 17, 1991

Relevance of scriptures 4.13

The events in the immortal epic, the Ramayana, emphasising infatuation and its consequent dangers, are being replayed in our lives even today. The body itself can be compared to Lanka while Ravana represents the human mind. His ten heads stand for the five senses and the five sensory organs. The individual yielding to the evil influences perishes ultimately.

Sri Rama symbolises virtue as He never compromised with anything unethical while upholding the principles of justice. But sometimes, even pious souls may be caught in the worldly trammels, thereby getting separated from Divinity. However, at the proper time, when the soul regrets its folly, a preceptor helps it to regain its glory by making it see the Almighty. Sri Sita was abducted by a cruel man and was taken away from Sri Rama. But Anjaneya, playing the dominant role of a preceptor, arranged for the re-union of the individual soul with the Lord.

The chief purpose of reading such Divine works is that the man of today should not succumb to the tempting influences but act courageously like Sri Rama and uphold the rules of righteous conduct. When we regret for the past and display our zeal to get back to the source of creation, the Supreme Lord, the spiritual leader will provide the guidance.

Character-moulding, avoiding the pitfalls like anger, passion, pride and malice and maintenance of integrity should be the objectives before an aspirant. All holy texts preach morals and one among them is in the form of a drama (in Sanskrit), "Sankalpa Suryodayam" contributed by the prolific writer Vedanta Desika.

Srimad Andavan in a lecture explained how the outpourings of the mystics -- the Azhwars in their hymns, which are collectively called the Divya Prabhandam bring out the agony of the soul that remains in the world, being pulled by various evil forces in different directions but is anxious to obtain liberation at the earliest. Desika's drama, portrays man's good traits and his weaknesses. The "Dravida Vedam" (Azhwars' Tamil scriptural works) and the Vedas are treasures to be preserved, enriched and their teachings strictly followed in life, to attain God's lotus feet.

May 15, 1992

Wise counsel essential for success 4.14

Deliberations with wise counsel are always necessary to achieve success in an endeavour. The holy texts point out the types of subjects to the discussed and the nature of persons whose opinions are to be sought. The man who desires to obtain such advice should be keen to anticipate the shape of events to come and take steps to prevent obstacles that may occur.

Men of distinction who wish to begin an enterprise, after consulting advisers who are devoted to his interest or whose views are identical with his and who invoke the blessings of the Divine, are to be considered superior. Those who take decisions by themselves are of a middling quality. Those who go ahead without assessing the merits and defects of a project and without concern for the rules of righteousness are of the worst type.

Likewise, if the solutions offered are unanimous and based on the rules of virtue, that scheme should be reckoned

as the best. The second best is the advice that has been tendered on the issue has been arrived at, after many minds differed in the initial stages, but later agreed. Where the discussions on the subject had resulted in various shades of opinion and where there was no positive contribution, the deliberations are to be categorised as bad.

In the Ramayana, after having witnessed the havoc caused by Anjaneya in Lanka, Ravana consulted his ministers on how to face the impending crisis. Many boosted his morale by claiming that they could face Rama easily and crush Him. All their talks were indeed vain boasts. The only one who tendered sincere advice, stating that the only way to escape extinction was to return Sita to Rama, was Vibhishana, who asked Ravana not to underrate the enemy.

"How had Rama offended you? On the other hand, you have abducted Sita forcibly. Please surrender Her." Vibhishana also tendered private advice later, explaining how there were evil portents ever since Sita was kept captive on the island. Ravana was annoyed at these words and his attitude hardened. He retorted that he saw no danger from any quarters, said Sri V. S. Venkataramana Rao in a discourse. Ravana then held a council. Severe criticism and censure also came from Kumbakarna that Ravana should have held these consultations before he had taken the hasty action. However, he agreed to support him.

April 12, 1993

Moral Law cannot be challenged 4.15

If man's life should be God-oriented, his activities should be strictly governed by the Law of Virtue. There should

be no deviation from the directives contained therein. Should there be a conflicting situation, the person concerned should not try to avoid upholding the rules or adopting the line of least resistance. He should not mind following the rules even should such a step result in his personal sacrifice. This Moral Law is unchallengeable and there shall be triumph for the person who respects it.

The Ramayana proves this by describing how Dasaratha who first conveyed his decision that Rama should succeed him and how within a short time, there was the "order" asking Him to spend 14 years in forest. Rama could have stayed back opting for the former but He chose the latter as it was of utmost importance to show the significance of the Law. Those who obey the Divine commandments will emerge triumphant.

How a rule under "Dharma" was scrupulously followed is illustrated by the sagacity of a Pandyan king. On his incognito night vigil, he overheard a conversation of a couple, in one house. The man who has to go on tour, was worried about leaving his wife alone in the house. The wife told him that under the able administration of the king, there was no need for any anxiety. The King, hence owning responsibility for her safety, guarded her house during her nights. But before the scheduled day of husband's return, there was some conversation in her room. Fearing the intrusion of some outsider, he tapped the door but suddenly withdrew from the spot as he feared that the husband might have returned and the tapping may cause embarrassment to the woman. To avoid such a contingency, he tapped the doors of a few more houses in the same street and left.

The next day, citizens complained to him about this event. "What is the punishment should the culprit who disturbed

your peace is traced" he asked them. "Severe his hand" they replied. The king immediately got his hand cut.

Sri M.R. Nagasubramaniam in a discourse, said, even if it may not be possible for one to help others, it would be wise not to harm them. Never should one try to create rift between a couple. This sin was committed by a servant maid who not only corrupted her mistress' mind but also painted a grim picture about her future should Rama become the King as His mother would assume a dominant role. Indoctrination transformed Kaikeyi's attitude and she forced Dasaratha to send away Rama.

May 1, 1993

One should discharge duties with dedication 4.16

Acquisition of spiritual knowledge and carrying out the duties ordained by the scriptural authority are the two important assignments given to a man to gain enlightenment. But they are being neglected and hence the resulting confusing situations.

A couple may bear a number of children but even if one among them turns out to be Godly and upholds the rules of virtue, the family's name will be written in gold. If the size of the family is restricted and if even the only child becomes a liquor addict, its reputation will get tarnished. The purpose behind the apparently two contradictory statements, one asking men to raise a large number of children and another forbidding big-sized families is to highlight the necessity to bring up one son to be a disciplined and a well-behaved one.

The role played by Kaikeyi in the Ramayana is well known. When the Divine drama ended and when the Lord went back to His abode, a list of persons who had done good and so who had to be sent to heaven and those who had resorted to bad deeds and who were reserved places in hell was presented. Surprisingly, Kaikeyi who was accused as being responsible for Rama's exile was given an exalted status.

The explanation was that though she might have committed a mistake, she had given birth to a son, Bharata, whose sacrifice was unparalleled and who gave up an empire for the sake of the Lord. Whatever may be the mother's record, her blemish was removed by a noble son. God will excuse our failings and grant us His blessings when we uphold His directives. "This does not mean that we should become Kaikeyis. The moral is, we must be good like Bharatas," said Sri Vishwesha Thirtha Swami in a discourse.

Those who were born as human beings must know what they have done in their lives during this temporary sojourn. Sri Madhwacharya has urged people to gain spiritual knowledge that will provide them wisdom. They should also do the duties assigned to them which will fetch them God's pleasure. Whatever may be the task one performs -- as a businessman or a white-collared worker or a skilled technician, one should discharge the obligations with dedication and honesty, sticking to scruples.

One should think of God throughout the day instead of concentrating on Him only during the few hours of worship in the mornings. Religious exercises will help the mind to become pure and entertain God in it even as the reflection of Sun can be seen only in clear water of a lake and not when it is turbid.

July 5, 1993

Significance of reciting "Hanuman Chalisa" 4.17

Man's needs have been classified by sages under four categories. Their primary requirement is wealth which is to be earned through honest means. This will naturally lead them to enjoy worldly pleasures. The third end which some pursue is righteous living, capable of giving greater joy and peace. Rare indeed are those who seek liberation from bondage.

All these four goals can be secured through prayers. To obtain them however, men have to ask only the source that is capable of granting them and without any doubt, it is God who has these powers. The Lord is the loving essence within our hearts.

The famous hymn in Hindi -- Hanuman Chalisa -- by Tulsidas spells out the procedure to be adopted to seek Divine blessings. Anjaneya (Hanuman) possessed a spotless character and when he is adored, a devotee's mind will be cleansed. The first attitude of a person who approaches God should be humility.

Invariably, people become arrogant due to their opulence, their charm and thirdly their intellectual attainments. While wealth and beauty may wither, arrogance arising out of intellect will remain, making them ridicule others as being devoid of wisdom. Hence stress is laid on cultivating humility while offering prayers and on retaining God's vision within. Anjaneya was a personification of this enviable triat.

In his lecture explaining the significance of a few initial verses of the Divine poem, Swami Swaroopananda said an aspirant should recite and sing God's praise. Tulsidas surrenders

at the feet of his mentor expressing these inadequacies and pleading with Him to give him strength, intelligence and knowledge.

To highlight how one should seek only the minimum needed, a story can be recounted about a miserly merchant. He was sailing back with goods and money, when the ship was caught in a storm. He was advised to pray and to give charity if he reached the shores safe. He agreed to donate one rupee and God appearing as a beggar, claimed the rupee. But the miser dodged him, asking his servants to say he was not home. He went to the extent of asking them to say he was dead. He was also carried on a bier. Even when the pyre was lit, the stingy man did not budge. God appreciated his one-pointedness and granted him a boon. 'Do not ask for the rupee' was his plea.

February 19, 1994

Everyone is destiny's handmaid 4.18

Though a person may be endowed with extraordinary merits and powers with which he can obtain his desires, he cannot face the challenge from one force. Everyone has to submit himself to its mighty influence. Not even God, so long as He remains in the world as a human being, can escape its impact. A monarch who planned to have his son succeed him could not succeed. Though he was invincible and could achieve anything and had the support of many wisemen none of his four sons was present when he passed away, despite the fact that all of them were born out of special religious rites. This most potent element is known as destiny.

Being inexorable, all are but its handmaid. The Ramayana illustrates this truism through Dasaratha. Contrary to the custom of seeking the royal priest's help in fixing an auspicious day for the coronation, Dasaratha himself decided upon it and asked the Rajguru to make further arrangements. His move did not materialise, though the prince to be crowned was God-incarnate himself.

Adherence to truth, obedience to righteous conduct and respect for honesty are the epic's directives to mankind. "Let virtue to which you have submitted yourself guide and protect you throughout your stay in the forest," said Sri Rama's mother when He was preparing to leave the capital on a 14-year exile. The Divine poem extols the auspicious and imcomparable qualities of Lord Rama. Outstanding among them was the gratitude He showed even for a trivial act of service. But He took no account of any harm done to Him, whatever be its intensity or magnitude. Lord Rama maintained His equanimity both when He was told about His intended coronation (it did not excite Him) and when informed about the sudden reversal of the events (neither did it dispirit Him).

Sri. R. Aravamudan, in his Harikatha, mentioned the role of devotees portrayed through Rama's brothers. Their only concern was to be of constant service to God. When he came to know about the desision to banish the Lord, Lakshmana burst out saying that He was under no obligation to obey the "mad" commands of the "old man" (his father) who, he added, had lost his power of judgment under the spell of the charms of one of the queens. At a later stage also, Lakshmana fretted and fumed at their father's action, characterising it as monstrous injustice. "What he has done is indefensible from any standpoint and deserves universal condemnation." was his opinion. That God alone is our refuge

is revealed by the advice given by Lakshmana's mother who asked him to look upon Rama as his father and mother. Bharata is a symbol of sacrifice. To him came unsolicited sovereignty but he rejected it, saying that the kingdom belonged to Sri Rama.

March 25, 1994

Lessons from the Ramayana 4.19

Even as a bird which soars high requires wings in perfect condition, a human being who desires to achieve spiritual progress should, besides being knowledgeable, think how to apply practically the guidelines learnt by him. If these two factors are not incorporated in his life, he may continue to grope in the dark. Despite being provided with eyes, he would be as good as blind if he does not focus his vision within himself and experience the presence of God. A Vedic master like Narada too wanted to know the nature of the soul and the methods towards gaining this knowledge.

Mankind is fortunate in having a text like the Ramayana which contains directives for a man to behave perfectly, confining himself to Moral Law. If the Bhagavad Gita projects the theoretical aspects as to how a man should conduct himself during his brief sojourn, the Ramayana serves as a practical book to make him lead a life based on virtue. Its hero, Rama was an integrated, ideal man for us to emulate.

During his life, man's activities are governed by three types of influences: one which promotes (a) purity and goodness:

(b) a thirst for pleasures; and (c) inertia. The reading of the disciplined life of Rama and chanting His name will equip us with moral courage.

The narrative in the epic commences with a lesson on how to approach a master seeking spiritual wisdom. We must go to him with a mind that should be ready to absorb and retain what is told. The character of Ravana was such that he obtained advice from many, but refused to follow them. Sage Valmiki sought edification from Sage Narada to tell him if he knows any man in this world who possesses 16 great qualities. Narada replies that the only one who is a reservoir of all of them is God-incarnate Rama.

Sri Chinna Sriman Narayana Jeeyar Swami referred to Valmiki's first query, 'Who is Gunavaan or a person whom all people will praise for this exceptional quality which will be rare and outstanding'. The word does not merely indicate development of character. It connotes the nature of one who inspite of his nobility by birth, his immense wealth, his enviable status and rare intellectual attainments and wisdom, chooses to move with natural intimacy and grace with those, who lack all of them.

Broadly, the term may mean, 'affability'. To illustrate this, Rama, despite being placed in a very high position, befriended a hunter Guha whom He held in such a high esteem and on His return from 14 years exile, asked Anjaneya to find out how he was. Secondly, Rama forged ties with a monkey king Sugriva, not out of any compulsion but due to His mercy. Lastly, He took into His fold, a noble man though hailing from the demon race, without any reservation.

July 7, 1994

Truth alone can help one reach the Divine 4.20

A person whose heart is filled with peace, whose speech is suffused with truth and whose body is dedicated to service, will be unaffected by the torments of the present age. Human life is noble, sacred and precious. Only they are endowed with the faculty to experience that they are part of the Divine. The human body is constituted by the five elements of Nature and five sheaths. Man is encompassed by attachment to worldly desires, which produce delusions of various kinds. To secure liberation, he has to rid himself of the desires.

Everyone feels proud of his body, mind and intellect forgetting the soul, which has no birth or death. It is like the root of the tree which sustains the branches, the leaves, the flowers and fruits. It is the basis on which the superstructure of life rests. The Vedas declare that man can attain immortality by renunciation. This means that a person has to renounce bad qualities. Men today are human only in form but have beastly traits. They should cultivate love of God, fear of sins and should adhere to social morality. When they cultivate both, they will not indulge in immoral deeds. It is hence meaningless to born as a human being if he leads an animal existence.

God can be known only be experience and not by experiments. For this, constant practice of spiritual exercises is needed. Of what use are experiments aimed at exploring space, if there is no genuine cultivation of human qualities and adherence to basic virtues like showing reverence to the parents and preceptors, said Sri Sathya Sai Baba in a lecture, urging everyone to live up to the motto "Help ever, hurt never."

Lord Rama had established an ideal for the society to follow. Urged by all to return to the city from His forest stay one of the sages even advocated certain arguments which smacked of atheism. Rama said: "I have given my word to carry out My father's command. How can I go back on it. It is better to give up the body than to do so. One should be grateful to one's parents, whether they are alive or dead. "The sun renders blind those who are ungrateful. I shall be the worst sinner and all people will follow Me and will also thereby become sinners. Do you want Me to set such a bad example." Parents who train their children and provide comfort to them the preceptors who guide them in exercising their discrimination and the "conscience" which enables them to decide judiciously are the guides for everyone.

August 4, 1994

Right way of life gives peace 4.21

All of us perform actions with a purpose. Each one may be working to achieve a different goal, but not without a purpose, because actions then become worthless. What we are all seeking ultimately is happiness and peace in our lives. Though we all work hard for it, we are unable to get it. By a careful introspection we will understand that we act in the world only for the fulfilment of our desires. Our lives are dictated by our wants, likes and dislikes, for we do not know the way of right living(Dharma).

Man can never be peaceful when he acts out of desires, but only when he learns to act according to his duty and abides by values relevant to his station in life. Dharma is

something which has to be followed. The Rishis of yore understood human psychology very well and they realised that in the name of religion they cannot impose their teachings and values on man. It is human nature to spurn anything which is forced and so only the Law of Nature can take care of man's failings.

Moreover, our sages were not dictators and never wanted to intrude on man's freedom. They had only his welfare in mind and so have showed the ideal way to lead a life through the Ithihasas and Puranas. Through the portrayal of the characters of the people they convey contrasting values, both, a life of sensuality and that of an ideal, righteous way of life giving man the freedom to exercise his choice.

Swami Swaroopananda in lecture on the Ramcharitamanasa of Tulasidas said, the Ramayana depicted two contrasting characters, Rama and Ravana to convey the importance of leading a life of Dharma. Rama was an embodiment of Dharma and culture who adhered to duty through the travails of life and on the other hand Ravana lead a life of sensuality.

Ravana had conquered the three worlds, but not himself, and so was always afraid, even while enjoying all comforts. When one does something wrong, there is always fear and cowardliness and so he can never be at peace. Rama on the other hand, had conquered the slavery of his mind and so was peaceful even though He had to live in the forest.

Another reason why we do not have peace in our lives is because we do not have love in our hearts. Loving is giving one self totally without expecting anything in return. Reciprocal love tantamounts to a bargain. Rama is depicted as a personification of love for He embraced even the brother of His enemy. The moment we understand true love there will be peace.

Ramayana as most of us think is not a mere story. For centuries this scripture has fascinated the minds of millions and a proper understanding of it can help us to lead our lives in an ideal manner.

February 1, 1995

Control the Senses with vigilance 4.22

Innumerable are the instances in the sacred texts to warn human beings about the vigil to be kept over the Senses. They wield such a tremendous influence that at times even men who have undergone rigorous discipline cannot escape their stranglehold. The various methods suggested in the scriptures to control the Senses will strengthen a person's moral calibre. A little lapse and losing the sense of judgment for a second may make them get submerged in the sea of re-births. Those who have however conquered the temptations and resisted the wiles of physical charms will be led to God's abode. In the Ramayana, the Lord admired the exceptional conduct of Sage Sarabhanga, worshipped him and witnessed his ascension to heaven.

To illustrate how even men who have reached a ripe age may be no exception in yielding to lust, a story is told about a scholar, in his old age giving tuition to a charming princess. But his physical proximity to the girl emboldened him to make advances towards her covertly. He however knew that any open expression of his passion will result in his death. He told the king that his daughter was possessed of an evil spirit and that her presence would endanger the

country. He asked the king to keep her in a box and cast it in a river, the sinister idea being that he could retrieve the box at a distinct spot and force her to marry him.

The king obeyed him but the box, even before it could reach the shore where the old man was waiting, was reclaimed by a prince who married her on the spot and replaced a bear inside it and let if float. The scholar, not knowing the change in the Divine plan took it to a lonely spot and opened it, eagerly awaiting the princess to emerge but was stunned to see the bear, which mauled him.

Another pathetic situation is recounted of a very wealthy old man who having got married to a young girl was forced to be ever vigilant as many young men started hovering around the house hoping to see her charming countenance. The aged man had also the responsibility to look after the lands ready for harvest. He had to run between the fields and the house all the time.

Sri M. Lakshminarasimhachariar in his discourse referred to the Vedic prayers to God that He should give men wisdom as that alone can ensure the right type of judgment. Lack of discrimination is bound to take a person to the periphery of disaster. Man to progress should entirely depend on the injunctions of the Vedas. Sagacity, respect for tradition and obedience to valid arguments of his brother, made Bharata agree to go back to the capital after getting an assurance from Rama that He would accept the kingdom on the completion of His exile.

April 20, 1995

Ignoring sane advice leads to ruin 4.23

It is a natural tendency among human beings to ignore the advice given to them by others. This arises out of the feeling that to do so will be an acceptance of their weakness and also because of over self-confidence. However to make such haughty persons correct themselves, wise men had pointed out about their wrongs in an oblique manner, by drawing their attention to instances where arrogance and disobedience to sane advice tendered, had resulted in their ruin. Such indirect reference have changed many but there may still be a few who defy even such valuable guidance.

Those pious men who extend such considered opinions will not mind the consequences as they know that truth is a bitter pill but that it is their duty to reform the turbulent. At best they may be made to face death but they are not worried about it because if destiny has so willed, they cannot avoid it. But no human being, however powerful he may be, can forcibly shorten the lives of others or has the power to extend the same even by a second or cause the birth of a child before it is due to be delivered.

The Ramayana illustrates how a lone personality Vibhishana took a bold stand to point out the crime that this brother Ravana had committed in abducting Sita. His name symbolises 'fearlessness' and unmindful of the outcome of his plain speaking, urged his brother to send Her back to Rama and thereby save his country and its citizens. But the ego in Ravana refused to give credentials to his views. Vibhishana reminded him of the daring acts committed by a lone monkey in destroying the entire city, a feat that was inconceivable and which could be achieved only by a super human force. When this warning failed, he cited the story of the most powerful but ruthless king Hiranyakasipu who was duly punished by God. He hoped that his indirect warning would at least set him thinking.

Sri Sukhi Sivam in his lecture said, Poet Kamban in his Tamil version of the epic has a chapter dealing with Hiranyakasipu's vengeful deeds and this part of the Divine poem is held as a brilliant portrayal of an evil character and as a piece of excellent poesy. Apart from Kamban's devotion to Lord Lakshminarasimha (God's incarnation in a man-lion form), the event shows that animal has strength and man, who lacks it, has wisdom. A combination of valour and intelligence can be found in'Narasimha'. The demon king tortured his child in many ways but Prahlada totally relied on God, knowing that excepting the Supreme Lord, no one had the power to create or take away a life. In his advice to Ravana, Vibhishana referred to the downfall of even mighty men due to yielding to lust, keenness to amass wealth or appropriating others' property. But Ravana rejected his advice branding him as a traitor.

May 30, 1995

Meet challenges with tenacity of mind — 4.24

Challenges in life are not uncommon but courageous persons will not get demoralised by them. They will endeavour to face them and emerge victorious. However. to meet various types of hurdles, four remedies are contained in the scriptural texts. First, the persons who are victimised should have absolute confidence that they will win with the help of Divine grace, unmindful of the hazards. Having taken a decision, they should not be upset by the mounting pressure, whatever be its magnitude.

For instance, a student entering a new course may be initially baffled by the plethora of experiments and voluminous text books but what counts for his continuance is his firm decision. Second, they should pay attention to the task they have undertaken. Their attention should not be half-hearted. Next comes their cleverness to thwart external attempts to jeopardise their achievements. Lastly, should there be any necessity they should display their valour and thwart the bid to side-track their efforts. Success is sure to those who maintain the will to complete their job.

Again, there are three entirely different types even among the challenges so created. One is usually from Divine agencies,who may be keen to find out the sincerity behind the man's efforts. Obstacles may arise out of interference from one's kith and kin, who may try to dissuade him from his proposed venture, may be out of their desire to protect his interests. Third, there may be certain factors created by nature, preventing him from going ahead with his plans.

All these aspects have been portrayed in the life of Anjaneya in the Ramayana. He was assigned the responsibility to locate Sita kept hidden by Ravana in Lanka. With dogged perseverance, he achieved his goal. There were obstructions but he would not yield to them. He used his sagacity, talent and physical strength to overcome them. A study of the chapter in the epic that deals with his exploits, wisdom and valour will equip a reader with all the ingredients needed to face ordeals and conquer them.

Sri R. Kannan Swamigal in a discourse explained that Anjaneya was able to resist attempts to stall his search mission because of his devotion to the Lord and the power derived out of the recitation of God's names. Reliance on God and his determination to achieve his goal enabled him to solve

all crises. He politely declined a warm reception extended to him, saying that he would not brook any delay in fulfilling his task and that he would accept the hospitality later. So too, when there was danger to his life, he took advantage of the occult powers of constricting or expanding his size.

September 4, 1995

Moral Law inviolable in nature 4.25

The Law of Morality, which has very clearly and elaborately chalked out man's duty and responsibility has eternal validity and is inviolable. Some people may argue that brave men will oppose the rules and that only the weak will meekly throw themselves before destiny. But there are clear instances of the benefits derived by those who have zealously upheld this Law unmindful of the inconvenience. On the other hand, those who have disregarded the commands have been crushed. The masterly interpreter of this Law's intricacies, Bhishma has warned of the deadly effects of contravening it and the disastrous outcome flowing out of such daring disobedience.

The Law lays down that the words of one's mother, father and of a scholar should always be honoured and their desires carried out. In general, if a person is not in a position to do a good act, he should at least refrain from indulging in committing a misdeed. The sacrifices made by one's parents have no parallel. In the Ramayana, God incarnate Rama consoles His mother when she broke down on hearing about His exile, explaining that she has to take care of her husband and attend on him.

Unable to reconcile himself to the unexpected turn of events when Rama was banished for no fault of His after all arrangements for His coronation were ready. Lakshmana, in anger and anguish points out that meek submission to fate is only a euphemism for cowardice. "Show me how this Law of Righteousness operates. I shall prick its bubbles by the tip of my arrow. Give me permission. My sword will annihilate discordant elements and I shall expose the king, who succumbing to passion, has agreed to send you to the forest."

In his discourse, sri N. Babu Dikshidar said that even those who belittle the importance of the Moral Law, during their arguments, will unconsciously ask their opponents, "Are the statements you make Vedic imperatives?" The tendency to obey them is inborn though some may feel that they have no respect for it. When Lakshmana was enraged, Rama cooly reminded him that the very act of his seeking permission from Him to punish their father was itself a proof as how the Law works because even under fits of anger, he had not failed to obtain His approval.

In spite of his uncontrollable fury, Lakshmana did not resort to violence, though he was ready to do so, if Rama gave the order. This is the manner in which respect for Law of Morality is deep-rooted in men. Obeyed, the Law will fetch fruits; defied, it will crush the culprit.

January 12, 1996

God's accessibility His foremost trait 4.26

Scriptural texts and works of sages, saints and apostles glorify the innumerable auspicious qualities of the Lord,

particularly His readiness to grant asylum to His devotees. God's compassion and how He granted succour even to evil-mined men have been extolled by His messengers. How can mortals enjoy His merits if He is removed far away from them and stations Himself in His paradise? Hence, He gave opportunities to His representatives to enjoy His excellent quantities when He came down to the earth. Not all could be present when He incarnated and hence God-men derive immense joy by witnessing Him in idols. Through them, they could visualise His admirable attributes and poured forth their songs. The idols and incarnations are complementary and bring out the compassionate nature of the Supreme Being.

Both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata bring out God's grace. In the former, the author refers to the 16 outstanding qualities of the Lord. As Krishna, He performed the very delicate task of proceeding as an envoy of the Pandavas to explore whether peace could be ensured. In several ways, He saved the Pandavas. Among the disciples of Ramanuja, Koorathazhwar was drawn more towards Rama and was always adoring His noble traits in his expositions. One of his disciples ventured to ask him one day why he was partial to Rama, while as Krishna, the Lord had also revealed His meritorious acts and he specified the instance of the peace mission undertook by Him.

The apostle's reply was that Rama was a prince and as such He could not be assigned the job of an ambassador. However, there was an occasion when He admired such a task by another and He felt sorry He was denied a similar privilege and so in His next manifestation, He Himself volunteered to do this service. All God's incarnations are identical in bringing out His concern for those who place their faith in Him.

The Jeeyar Swami of Vanamamalai Math in a discourse said, the Lord descended on the earth to protect the pious and thereby revealed His easy accessibility. The destruction of wicked men was also His concern but this could have been accomplished by His will. Koorathazhwar who had done yeoman service to propagate the ideals of his mentor left within a short span of his lifetime a great legacy in the form of books praising both the Lord and the Divine Mother. He was survived by his two sons, one of whom Parasara Bhattar inheriting all his genius wrote a brilliant commentary on the Sri Vishnu Sahasranama which projects the countless auspicious qualities of the Lord and is called the 'Mirror reflecting God's qualities' (Bhagavad Guna Darpanam).

July 6, 1996

Scriptural injunctions must be followed 4.27

That a person gains merit for his pious and noble acts and gets punished for his sinful deeds and those prohibited by injunctions, has been clearly spelt out in the scriptures. The benefits earned by a righteous person, who is not reborn will go to those who were close to him and the sins to those who had been inimical to him. How to avoid doing the prohibited acts has been laid down in our sacred works.

A dialogue between the Lord in His incarnation as Rama, and Anjaneya in the 'Rama Gita contained in one of the texts explains how man can lead a life of purity. The latter addresses the former as 'Rama Paramacharya' and asks Him how to get reconciled to man's sufferings and joys. Rama replies that man has to carry out certain duties which will enable

him to refrain from indulging in bad acts and which will result in spiritual knowledge and devotion in stages, and experience ultimate bliss here itself.

The Divine commands, said Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, Kanchi Sankaracharya, referred to the duties which a person ought to carry out regularly like offering worship and honouring parents through ceremony after their death. They will not fetch any fruit but will please God. If omitted, man may incur God's displeasure. Under no circumstances should they be given up. The second category of actions lists performing ceremony on certain specified occasions like the eclipse. The third type of duties are performed with the object of obtaining specific results like observing vows. The duties enjoined when carried out will cleanse the mind and will help in gaining knowledge and devotion. The devotion so developed should not be displayed in an ostentatious manner.

Why then should a man face problems? Cannot God keep him free from them? The revelations in the Vedas contain the guidelines to lead a life of peace. It is a misconception to say that the Vedas concern themselves only with rituals. Far from it, they have hymns adoring Gods. Adi Sankara's hymns (Stotras) on several forms of God explain how reciting them with faith as well as studying the significance of scriptures will fetch liberation. The two steps (Stotras and Sastras) will result in gradually getting rid of the worldly attachments and in knowing the true nature of 'Self'. Devotion can be developed through the worship of idols till a stage is reached when man realises his non-dual nature. When a man obeys the scriptures and acquires knowledge of the 'Self' he knows that the spirit in him is identical with the Reality. Action (duties), knowledge and devotion are prescribed in the scriptures to secure liberation.

September 3, 1996

God condones the devotee's faults 4.28

Human nature is such that a person will remain affectionate and intimate with his friend only till the latter enjoys prosperity and sound health. The moment he faces problems and adversity or suffers from prolonged illness, the former's tendency will be to desert him. But there is one who is a friend of all, at all times and on all occasions, who will rush to protect us and relieve our distress. He is God. He will remove all the problems of the devotee. We have to depend on Him totally.

God has declared that He is our well-wisher. He has not used the terms that He is our "Father" or "Mother" because there may be rare occasions when a person may show his animosity towards Him, but invariably, he will never leave a friend. God has assured that He will efface all dangers of those who take shelter in Him. For instance, the trials faced by the Pandavas and Draupadi in particular were created by their cousins but Lord Krishna extended His protection and He even assumed the role as their envoy.

But in the case of Ravana, Rama had to punish him because of his grave misconduct. While Rama could have struck him with one dart when the demon-king stood in the battlefield stripped of all his weapons He gave him another chance and allowed him to return later, fully equipped. What more magnanimity can anyone display?

When Vibhishana hesitated whether Rama would give him asylum as he was His enemy's brother, He demonstrated how He would accept anyone, irrespective of any default, if he offers his surrender. Even should Ravana approach Him, He was willing to forgive him. Such is the affection God shows towards Him devotees.

The Jeeyar Swami of Ahobila Math in his discourse in this connection cited the characteristics of the three brothers. When each was granted a boon, Ravana preferred to be a monarch, Kumbakarna wanted to be invincible, while Vibhishana desired that under all circumstances, threats and dangers, he should remain wedded to the Law of Virtue. To him, Rama granted asylum, knowing his sincerity when he came to Him leaving all his kith and kin and possessions.

The Lord is ever merciful. There is no need to ask Him to grant our needs. To serve Him, obey His directives and abide by His dictates are privileges conferred on a devotee. Even Ravana describes Rama as the Supreme, while his wife's praise of Him stands testimony to His admirable traits. "Let us sincerely carry out the Divine injunctions and rely on help from our steadfast friend, the Lord".

June 26, 1997

Follow the path shown by elders 4.29

Man suffers and cries for so many trivial things in the world but rarely one weeps in agony because of separation from God. Tears play an important role in cleansing the mind of its craving for material pleasures so that devotion can take root. A devotee who has reached this stage in his spiritual evolution and pines for the Lord, to whom the attractions of the world have faded away, will easily win His grace.

Many saints in their hymns have expressed the alternating states of agony and ecstasy experienced during the course of their spiritual evolution. This is due to the different moods experienced by the devotee; elated when he tastes Divine

bliss sometimes and despondent when he feels separated from Him. This exalted stage in devotion has been described by Bhattadri in the Narayaneeyam, "I shall move about with my mind thoroughly melting with devotion, sometimes laughing loudly, sometimes crying, sometimes roaring, sometimes singing and dancing like a mad man and without any regard for the normal conventions of the world."

In his discourse Sri B.Sundar Kumar said, Sita's agony over Her separation from Rama during Her enforced stay in the Ashoka grove portrayed the separation of the soul from God. From the moment it takes birth, the soul strives for re-union with God.

The paradox and predicament of human birth is similar to Sita's plight when Hanuman saw Her in the Ashoka park which is portrayed tellingly, "She seemed to Hanuman at once adorable and pitiful, like the holy word torn from its context by infidels, like prosperity sunk in unmerited ruin, like shattered hope and faith betrayed, like frustrated fulfilment, like intellect muddied by insanity, like blameless purity besmirched by foul slander". The soul truly belongs to God, but when born in the world it loses its glory and pines to regain its original state.

The spiritual evolution of man is a long process in which he has to seek guidance from the scriptures to progress on the path. Codified by the sages they have different versions and it is best to follow that which has been practised by the elders of one's family.

The scriptures attach great significance to this because it is important to understand that its injunctions are varied to suit the needs of different people. The rationale behind this is that human birth itself is determined by the Almighty in accordance to one's past which must find the most suitable

environment in the world to evolve further. By following the path shown by the elders of one's family one is bound to progress faster spiritually.

July 5, 1997

Man's actions shaped by destiny 4.30

One of the eternal topics of our sacred literature is the grip of destiny on man. Man's actions are pre-determined and he will behave only in particular ways. Hence there is no use in his resisting the influence of this powerful force or trying to adopt his own line. Scholars have always impressed upon the devout that there is no alternative but to submit to its impact when it strikes him. Prayers and appeal to God will provide him the strength to remain calm.

But even thousands of years ago, when God made His descent and demonstrated how to lead a life of virtue, a treatise was made available to mankind about the vagaries of destiny. The dissertation was by Rama during His meeting with Bharata who had come to the forest to prevail upon Him to return to the capital and take over the reins of administration. The 16 verses of Rama in Valmiki Ramayana embody great truths.

"No man can act just as he likes; he is not the master of his fate. Destiny drags him hither and thither. All garnered wealth is spent some day men rise only to fall and meetings end in partings. As ripe fruits inevitably fall to the ground, so too a man born perishes. Like a house with its strong pillars growing old and rickety and tumbling down, men die caught in the toils of old age. Life will wear out whether

you sit still or go about". At sunrise, men may rejoice thinking they may work and earn. At sundown, they are also happy hoping they can enjoy material comforts. But no one realises that his or her life is shrinking.

Among these glorious verses, two are of great significance, said Sri S.R. Raghothamachar in his discourse. "Just as two logs of wood come together on the high seas by chance and, having been together for some time, then drift, so too members of a family come together and get separated later". "Just as a man, coming up with a caravan on the march", says 'I too shall go with you', "so too the road that our forefathers trod is the everlasting one that all of us should take".

During the dialogue between Rama and Bharata, the former adheres to His vow to honour His father's words and spend 14 years in forest while the latter forcefully pleads with Him to return saying that an unjust order was passed by their father. Rama was firm and never showed even the slightest sign of yielding. Rama vehemently argues that the world is anchored in Truth and that "Righteousness" which exalts it is regarded as the highest in the world. "I shall obey my father's command" was God-incarnate's vow.

September 29, 1997

Quest for peace: Sri Krishna's mission 5.1

God acts according to the wishes of His sincere devotees, Sri Krishna agrees to go as an emissary and bring about a rapproachment between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, avoiding the path of war in settling their dispute. Fully aware that His errand will not be a success, He complies with the request of His devotees (the Pandavas). Only Sahadeva declares that a battle is inevitable .

Sri Sengalipuram Anantarama Dikshitar in his discourse referred to the several occasions when Krishna showed His real form as Sri Vishnu to many of His devotees, irrespective of their status. Vedanta Desika has mentioned about Sri Krishna's darshan to a fruit vendor, who, struck by His beauty (as a child) presents Him with cherries. When her basket gets emptied, she looks up, only to witness His magnificent stature. At the same time, her basket is filled with priceless diamonds.

When preparations for the Kurukshetra battle are ready, Yudhishtirar gets depressed at the possible aftermath and urges Sri Krishna to prevail upon Duryodhana to come to terms, thereby averting bloodshed. Arjuna and surprisingly even Bhima and Nakula share this view, although Sri Krishna makes it plain that one cannot expect fair play from Duryodhana. As He sets out on His task Draupadi reminds Him of the humiliation she had suffered at the hands of the Kauravas and Sri Krishna assures her, whether there be a war or a treaty, those who had insulted her will be duly punished.

Duryodhana refuses to part with even a square inch of territory and Gandhari's advice too proves a waste. When Duryodhana thinks of binding Sri Krishna with ropes, the

latter takes His Viswarupa, in which the entire universe is visible. The elders, including Dhritarashtra, whose eyesight is restored for the nonce, worshipped the Lord. Ultimately, the Pandavas win the war, proving that Dharmam and Satyam will always triumph. Throughout this mighty epic, the Mahabaratham, the value of these two qualities and the Pandavas' adherence to them in spite of the worst trials, are underlined.

January 16, 1964

Hindu Dharma: Methods to show gratitude 5.2

God not only protects the righteous but also removes the evil elements, as and when occasion demands. This is analogous to plants, which, in addition to requiring water for their sustenance, need the uprooting of weeds raising their heads along with them.

Sir Sengalipuram Anantarama Dikshitar in his discourse said that certain acts, inherently bad in nature and prohibited under ordinary circumstances, could be performed in times of expediency (Aapadh Dharma). But once the necessity ceased, they should be discontinued. This was illustrated by the birth of Pandu, Dhritarashtra and Vidura. Likewise, later, King Pandu urged his wife. Kunti to bear children in order to keep the progeny With the special boon granted to her by sage Durvasa, she presented him with Yudhishtra. Bhima and Arjuna, and also helped Madri (the second wife of Pandu) to beget Nakula and Sahadeva in the same manner. While young, she had already invoked the Sun God, through whom she obtained Karna, but had to desert him. Very often some people cited these instances and twisted them to suit their

own ends. If the mind was unsullied and the characters were viewed with purity, bad thoughts would never occur to them. Freqüently, the Rasa Leela was referred to and some persons asked as why they should not also follow suit, when Sri Krishna Himself had resorted to "playful indulgence". To them, the fitting retort would be. God once gulped poison to save mankind, but would they too dare perform this feat? God, is so gracious that He will bless all those who think of Him, hear about Him or His greatness, chant speak or sing about His glory and prostrate and surrender before Him. The basis of Hindu culture is Dharma and Satyam.

The same day as Bhima was born. Duryodana also made his appearance as the eldest child of Gandhari, wife of Dhritarashtra. Seeing ill omens, the elders advised the king to sacrifice the child for the welfare of the entire race, alluding to Sastras which permitted this. But the king, bound by affection, allowed him to grow. Hindu Dharma has laid down the modes of repayment of our debt of gratitude. To Gods, this can be done by the performance of yagnas and pujas. Rishis can be satisfied by the study and recitation of even portions from the Vedas. Our duty towards the deceased forebears is to conduct ceremony. The eatables offered during the shradha are delivered to them in the form of amrita. Lastly while living in society, we should sympathise with the people in distress and try to do our best to mitigate their suffering.

October 21, 1964

Need to pray for fortitude to bear sorrow 5.3

Old age and death shadow an individual from his very birth and the most valiant or an intellectual genius can never

conquer them. Permanent immersion in grief will, therefore not help to restore a dead person to life. Comforting the agitated Yudhishtirar, Sri Krishna said it was sheer folly to bemoan the loss of his relatives in the war as their lives should come to an end at one time or other. Moreover, they had played heroic roles and were engaged in just warfare and hence, on their death, had been elevated to an exalted status in God's kingdom.

In his discourse Sri Karpangadu Venkatachariar said despite the advice given by so many, Yudhishtirar was still unhappy and even wanted to resort to a fast unto death as he felt he was principally responsible for the tragedy and there was no pleasure in ruling an empire in the face of such a calamity. Denouncing his move, Sage Vyasa told him that one should never be unduly elated over a happy event nor get bogged totally in grief over some mishap. Every act of a person was predetermined by God and would definitely take place according to His decision and hence an individual's wish could never prevail over God's will.

Vyasa referred to the wise counsel of a Sage that a man's pattern of life was set by God, based on his past deeds. Sorrow and joy were bound to occur alternately in one's life. What one should pray to God was to grant him the fortitude and provide the strength to bear the blows instead of asking Him to spare him completely from the agony. One should learn to endure suffering cheerfully by drawing comfort from those who had undergone more intense grief and yet had borne it patiently and courageously. Vyasa asked Yudhishtirar to rule his kingdom, accepting it as a Divine verdict.

May 11, 1967

Mahabharata's stress on truth and righteousness 5.4

The main theme underlying the Mahabharatham emphasises that unscrupulous and unethical conduct, duplicity and evil deeds will never pay. One can achieve perfection and reach God solely guided by the twin factors- Righteousness and Truth (Dharmam and Satyam). The epic, a mammoth edifice with Devotion as its foundation projects Vidhura's intellectual acumen, Kunti's sagacity, Gandhari's chastity and other spiritual values. It is an encyclopaedia of Laws and rules relating to the preservation of character.

Sri Manjakkudi Rajagopala Sastrigal in his discourse said in the very first of the 100 chapters (with verses numbering one lakh), the relationship between the teacher and the taught was illustrated. Asked to arrange for the closure of the breach in the bund of a field, the disciple laid himself across the gap to prevent water from seeping through, thus earning the admiration of his Guru for his dedication. Another episode mentioned a puppy accidentally happening to pass by a place where religious rites were being performed, and being beaten by the gathering, though it had not seen the oblations. Its mother felt that the young one had been unnecessarily injured while it had not committed any wrong and said anyone who punished a weaker individual without any provocation was bound to meet with some calamity. Written in the form of a narrative to bring out the hidden truths in the Vedas, the work is interspersed with innumerable stories which on a deeper probe will reveal secret messages.

February 29, 1968

Munificence without mental reservation, a virtue 5.5

The noble trait of munificence will become tainted if it is not blended with a feeling of warmth. In extending hospitality or giving a gift, there should be absolutely no mental reservation. It is better to turn down a request openly, confessing one's unwillingness to oblige than to concede it with great reluctance -- a pleasant 'no'' is preferable to a harsh 'yes'. The value of a help rendered is assessed not by the material worth of the assistance but by the spirit behind the gesture and the timing of it. If Karna's name has become a by-word for charitableness, it is because he cheerfully gave away whatever was asked of him, regardless of other considerations. He reached the pinnacle of the virtue when, right on the battle-front, he dedicated the fruits of his good deeds to Sri Krishna, Who sought them as a gift.

This Karna did unhesitatingly and without a demur, despite the strangeness of the request and the critical nature of the hour. What more, when Sri Krishna, pleased with his action, offered to grant him a boon, Karna did not seek the Kauravas' triumph in the war, but prayed that, if he was destined to take more births, he might be blessed with the same disposition to help others generously.

Sri Swaminatha Thambiran in his discourse narrated the course of the Kurukshetra war, pointing out how Sri Krishna not only played the role of a charioteer to Arjuna but, at several critical moments, saved the Pandavas from danger, ensuring their victory.

October 3, 1972

Pious people are always patient and restrained 5.6

The term "Itihasas" (Epics) indicates that episodes in them are real and true and that the characters therein had actually gone through several vicissitudes. Their personal experiences had been brilliantly embroidered in the main theme, each one throwing valuable lessons to help posterity to set its own house in order. The tribulations of Draupadi, who was about to be publicly defamed, reveal three vital aspects closely associated with every individual's life stream. Unscrupulous elements will have the least compunction in indulging in any ignoble deed, taking an inexplicable pleasure in tormenting others. There is no rationale behind their detestable behaviour. Otherwise, Duryodhana's brother would not have dared to attempt to disrobe her. Even under such worst provocations and although they have the inherent capacity to punish the culprits, men wedded to virtue will not take Law unto themselves but will strictly adhere to the rules of Righteousness, leaving the entire matter to the Divine force to decide. Patience and restraint are the distinctive hallmarks of the pious like Yudhishtirar.

Sri R. Muthukrishna Sastrigal in his discourse said the third message projected by this episode is about God's unfailing mercy for those who seek His protection without any reservation and realising that He alone is the ultimate refuge. God's response will be instantaneous to those who sincerely express their inability. In her perilous situation when the Pandavas stood utterly helpless at the atrocious acts of the Kauravas, Lord Krishna to whom Draupadi made a stirring appeal, came to her rescue. When one entrusts himself to the Almighty, He takes the responsibility to save him and He knows in what form and at what time should

the help be extended. Draupadi's verse invoking His response has been suitably incorporated in our daily prayers.

February 6, 1974

How destiny operates 5.7

Occasions will be numerous when a person has to take crucial decisions requiring sane judgement. His interests may be affected and hence he has to be doubly cautious. It is at this juncture that destiny operates. Those devoted to God will submit to fate's ways. They will plead to the Almighty to grant them strength to bear the staggering blows, as they will be fully conscious that no one will be spared by it.

For instance, everyone knows about the consequences of gambling. It will make even the astute fall into its dragnet. There will be innumerable advisers to encourage people to gamble, extolling the beneficial aspects but without warning that ruin will follow if they lose. When stakes are involved, the chances of tempers running high and of mutual rancour are greater. But still people are unable to resist it because of destiny. That was the chief reason why the wise Yudhishtirar agreed to play the game of dice at the invitation of Duryodhana. God the merciful always tries to save devotees from downfall.

In his discourse Sri Burra Sivaramakrishna Sarma said when Yudhishtirar displayed signs of disinclination to play, Duryodhana asked him not to be a coward. The idea behind asking the Pandava chief to join the game was to deprive him of his entire property as Duryodhana was jealous of the Pandavas prosperity. Unable to conduct a Rajasuya yaga or to defeat the Pandavas in a straight fight, Duryodhana resorted to the sinister plan of cheating, with the connivance of his

uncle, while throwing the dice. The Epic exposes the evil of envy and reveals how the unscrupulous will be punished if they allow the virtuous to suffer.

January 7, 1980

Integrity and purity of character 5.8

The index of a man's eminence, irrespective of his position, scholastic attainments and wealth, is his integrity. The higher the position he occupies, the greater will be his responsibility to maintain the purity of his character.

The Mahabharatha presents two men of impeccable calibre, one of them maintaining his character till the end (Bhishma) and the other, Nahusha, succumbing to lust and getting punished. In the latter case, a man was elevated to the highest pedestal, but lost his balance due to savage lust and failed to live up to the expectations. As Lord Krishna declares man commits sins, becomes impure and misbehaves due to two inveterate foes-lust and lucre. They envelope him throwing a smoke screen, as it were making him yield to temptations. Scriptures advise men to avoid the company of women with whom he is barred from being close. Even sages had fallen a victim to the charming countenances of women Nahusha, an illustrious emperor who had distinguished himself following the religious discipline, was provided with an opportunity to act as the Head of the celestials. He could not however resist the beauty of a woman and in his anxiety to reach her, incurred the curse of a sage and was sent back to the world as a python. His repentance resulted in the modification of the curse that the day of his deliverance would be the occasion of the visit of the Pandavas to him and the eldest among them answering his questions.

Yudhishtira replied that a man's acquisitions-of knowledge, fame and riches would be purposeless if he was characterless, Sri N. Giridhari Prasad said in a discourse, He explained how Ramakrishna took a lump of earth in one hand and a piece of gold in the other, treated them alike and threw both into a river.

October 9, 1980

Better to remain as foes than being untrue friends 5.9

Camaraderie is a two-way channel. The affection that exists between two friends should be mutual, each reciprocating to the sentiments of the other. It is better to remain as foes than two people acting as close friends but in private working against each other harbouring mistrust and adopting measures for the downfall of the other. This applies to partners in life as well as in many cases, couple may conduct themselves as an endearing ideal pair in society but within the confines of four walls, display antagonism towards one another.

Sage Vyasa advised the dejected Yudhishtirar, the embodiment of virtue, not to grieve over the animosity shown by Duryodhana. Even should Yudhishtirar extend his hand of friendship. Duryodhana, out of conceit, would reject it as he never wanted his cousins to prosper, Vyasa also made it plain that come what may, the issues between the two groups would be settled only through war.

The Mahabharatha highlights the havoc resulting from gambling, in any form. For instance Yudhishtirar was lured

and made to yield to the tempting words of Duryodhana and his associates. But when an opportunity arose to play a second time, Draupadi made him roll the dice after uttering the names of the Lord when, to the surprise of all, he won. On all previous occasions, he had tasted only defeat. This reveals that God will certainly protect His devotees. But often He chooses to test them-at times even to the extent of making them totally exasperated. That is only to compel them to hold on to Him with greater resolve.

Devotees, by virtue of their continuous suffering, may even wonder whether God exists at all and if so wonder why He should tease them to the point of breaking them down. The more the ordeals, the greater should be our confidence in His succour. Like a surgeon who removes a boil by a knife, though it causes pain God examines our patience but ultimately. He grants us the Bliss. Draupadi's life is an instance of extreme Faith.

Sri Keeran in his Mahabharatham discourse said for the success of a person, his endeavour alone would not suffice. At the same time, no one could expect God to feed him at his doorsteps. People who put in their best efforts could not also claim to reach the top of the ladder and get the rewards. Personal sacrifice should be combined with Divine grace and the blessings of forebears who had undertaken good deeds.

October 11, 1980

Wealth and power must be used for public good 5.10

May be, one is endowed with enormous wealth, great prowess or extraordinary intellect. But that does not confer

on him any right to intimidate harass or treat with contempt his less-fortunate brethren. He must guard himself against self-conceit and arrogance, the twin evils that are likely to stem from a feeling of superiority. It would be ideal if he uses the God-given gifts for the benefit of mankind. It is certainly objectionable if he resorts to oppression of the weak.

In the same way, the powers vested in the ruler of a country are intended to be used for public good, not to victimise anyone. Just because there is no one to challenge his authority, he cannot turn tyrannical, throwing to the winds all norms of justice and righteousness. Before long, he would be made answerable for all his misdeeds. Unlike the Law of the land, which is made use of immediately to punish the criminals, the Almighty acts slowly but unerringly. The wrong-doers are often given a long rope. The idea is to give them a chance to mend their ways. In this interregnum, they seem to prosper and go stronger, making the righteous-minded sometimes wonder the wisdom of upholding Dharma itself.

Jarasandha, a mighty king, had many good traits, but he teased and humiliated other rulers. He had taken 86 kings captive, in pursuance of his decision to capture and decapitate one hundred rulers. Killing them in battle would not be improper because fighting was Kshatriya's duty and the one who died in action would reach the heaven. What Jarasandha had planned to do was just slaughter.

Sri T.S. Balakrishna Sastrigal, in a discourse said that, though Sri Krishna had several encounters with Jarasandha, the Lord chose not to kill him Himself but had him slain

through Bhima, thus paving the way for Yudhishtira to qualify for the performance of Rajasuya Yaga.

May 20, 1981

Devotee relies solely on God's succour 5.11

Nothing can be more distressing than to witness the pitiable plight of those who had once wielded enormous power, enjoyed unlimited comforts and commanded tremendous respect, now being deprived of everything and facing near extinction. More than men, the womenfolk will feel greatly hurt in such a humiliating situation. More so, if they are forced to depend on others. However, those who take refuge in God and rely solely on His succour, will not lose their morale. Laymen will, on the other hand, get jittery and will even adopt dubious methods to get back the lost position. They are bound to fail if they try to believe in their physical strength. A typical example is provided in the Mahabharatha where the cheated Pandavas were sent out to stay in the forest for 12 years, stripped of all wealth. But they never lost their courage and were able to get over all the tests, guided by Lord Krishna at every stage. The worst trial came in the form of a request from Durvasa for a lunch for his entourage at an inopportune time. Here again, God saved the Pandavas and the sage, known for his bad temper, was humbled. Devotees should cling to the feet of God with full confidence that He shall never fail.

In his discourse Sri M.P. Annamalai Mudaliar said the Pandavas were to remain disguised for one year and they

took up different assignments in Virata's kingdom. Yudhishtirar (the emperor-to-be) worked as a royal courtier, Bhima the valiant, as a cook, Arjuna the wise as a dance-teacher, Nakula and Sahadeva in the stables.

Draupadi, who at one time had numerous servants at her beck and call, worked as an attendant. All of them refused to be shaken but remained undaunted. They had received advice from mentors as how to conduct themselves.

At the end of the period, they revealed their identity and took steps to retrieve the territory that legitimately belonged to them.

June 26, 1981

The inexorability of destiny 5.12

Temples are the abodes of God and the consecrated idols radiate special powers. Because of the sanctity attached to the shrines, the priests, who are privileged to conduct the worship on behalf of the devotees, are held in high esteem. Society considered them blemishless and as men of impeccable character. Their actions were not questioned and their motives were never doubted. Because of this illustrious tradition, Lord Siva, who acted as a mediator between Sundaramurthi Nayanar and his spouse, donned the role of a "Sivacharya" and went to the latter's house at an odd hour. Such an act by anyone other than a priest would have been considered sheer sacrilege, but since He took the garb of a priest, none could raise an accusing finger against Him.

But, by unforeseen circumstances, should a priest himself commit a misdeed like lifting of temple property, how can

he be excused? The explanation for such a misfortune can only be attributed to the intervention of the mighty force "destiny" which spares none. The inexorability of this superior power is one of the themes handled in the Mahabharata.

A highly intelligent-person may put forth all his endeavour and be fully qualified to discharge a particular obligation, but he may falter. On the other hand, a simpleton may suddenly be pushed up to a high status. When the wheel of fate starts operating, even the normal thought processes may be found to be numb or the wise may be made to choose the wrong path. Yudhishtira discarded all advice and opposition from his kith and kin not to accept his cousin's invitation to play a game of dice. It was fate which propelled him on. Yudhishtira started losing his belongings one by one but destiny made him pledge his kingdom also.

Sri Keeran in his discourse said, the arrogant Duryodhana spoke contemptuously of Vidhura, the custodian of ethics, who advised him not to inveigle the pious Yudhishtira. Vidhura knew that destiny's tentacles had started gripping him and his act was the beginning of his end.

February 20, 1985

Six companions of man 5.13

Six among the most important virtues which a man should strive to cultivate are laid down in the scriptures as adherence to Truth, acquisition of Knowledge to sift the grain from the chaff, the follow the rules regarding charity to the needy, to display mercy, to maintain equanimity and to be restrained,

patient and tolerant. The highest value is assigned to the utterance of Truth at any cost and is hence compared to a mother. Wisdom generated both through restraining from doing what is prohibited and experience, is likened to the father. Generosity is a man's brother while the trait of showing kindness even to the weak and the unprotected is like a good friend. To remain peaceful and calm despite adverse circumstances can be compared to a wife while the quality of patience is equated with one's son. These are our constant companions in life.

The Mahabharatham, through the words and deeds of the Pandavas, spells out how man should conduct himself. When tossed by the waves of challenges, even the pious persons who hold on to God's feet, may lose their morale. Tests, given by God, are intended to develop the moral courage to face them and hence we should not abuse the Supreme Power that has provided comforts and material benefits. When the Pandavas were in a quandary as how to avoid the curse of a sage for having, unintentionally, committed an act that was bound to kindle the wrath of a sage, Lord Krishna, their mentor, suggested a way out by which they were each asked to reveal, without hiding anything what passed in their mind.

Yudhishtirar's concern was to uphold Righteousness, Sri Keeran in his discourse said, Bhima declared that he would worship every married woman as his mother, despise others' property and consider others' grief as his own. Arjuna felt that his honour was more precious than his life. Nakula said scholastic attainment was essential even to the affluent. Sahadeva referred to the six comrades of man.

February 22, 1985

Religious recipes for keeping the mind pure 5.14

Hinduism has provided an aspirant, who is eager to get rid of worldly bondage, with an exhaustive list of spiritual exercises. They include nine methods of cultivating devotion and eight types of personal worship. They will enable a sincere person to move with saintly characters, keep the mind pure, retain the vision of God within and treat every being as God's creation.

The highest priority among the nine modes of 'Bhakthi' has been assigned to listening to the expositions of scriptural literature which reveal the incomparable and remarkable traits of God, particularly His compassion to the weak.

The best example of a beneficiary of Divine grace was that of a king who, mistaking the silence of a saint (who was in a state of trance following deep meditation) as an insult, threw the skin of a dead snake around his neck. For his act of indiscretion, he suffered a curse but he got released from the shackles which tied him to worldly activities through "Sravanam". He was the grandson of the Pandavas who fought a righteous war, with the help of Lord Krishna and demonstrated that those who uphold the Law of Virtue will never fail.

The Mahabaratha has a wide-ranging interest-literary, sociological, political, spiritual and ethical. Lord Krishna acted as the mentor of the Pandavas, who symbolised "Righteousness". The trials they faced could have made anyone else, placed under similar circumstances, totally collapse but they pinned their faith in God's dispensation and emerged victorious. To study how they were saved will give us mortals moral strength, Sri S. Jayarama Sarma, explained in a discourse. Four out of the eight religious recipes for steadying the mind are mentioned in this Epic. The eight relate to: tasting and taking

a dip in the holy Ganga, chanting the Gayatri mantra, reciting at least a chapter from the Gita, worship of an image, offering it. Thulasi petals, sandalwood paste and other tributes, observing fast twice in a month (Ekadasi), dedicating what we eat at the feet of the Lord and repeating the 1008 names of God (Sahasranama).

The tale of Ganga and her son Bhishma, the significance of Gayathri through the Savithri episode, the song-celestial (Gita) and the praise of Vishnu through the garland of hymns containing His glorious attributes, form part of the Mahabaratha. It is a narration of God's support to noble causes.

March 26, 1986

Influence of attachment 5.15

While mentioning about various human foibles, sacred texts never fail to refer to the influence of attachment to one's kith and kin. It will take precedence over duty and righteous action. A person may remain disciplined, follow the tenets of Dharma and discharge his duties without fear but all these will fall flat before affection. Should one be compelled to help a person whom he loves deeply but who is in difficulty and should this involve his giving a go by to his principles, he will not mind stepping aside even from the path of virtue.

The Mahabharata projects this theme through various instances. Attachment versus Duty is also the central question discussed in the dialogue between the Lord and His devotee. The itch to wield the arms and punish the culprits vanished when Arjuna thought of his relationship with Bhishma and

Drona. "Of what purpose is the battle in which millions will perish and of what use governing a country after annihilating many". When Karna sought a boon that should he die, Kunti should acknowledge openly that he was her son and when she agreed, it again indicated the powerful grip of deep affection.

That there should be no compromise on principles is another theme discussed in the Epic, Sri Keeran said in a discourse. In the case of fine arts, there may be occasions when the artiste may be confronted with certain baffling predicaments. In such cases, invariably, he may try to utter untruth and escape from the situation. For instance, if a master in astrology finds himself in a quandary, precluding him from spelling out the real position, he may give vague replies. But an artiste who is true to his profession will not hesitate to speak the truth.

Sahadeva was an expert in astrology and under strange circumstances, he was asked by his arch-enemy Duryodhana, to prescribe the auspicious time to commence the war. Fully aware that such a step would spell his own ruin but at the same time, knowing that he should be true to the Art which he had mastered, he still stipulated the time. However during such occasions, God will protect these sincere and honest men. The Lord changed the date by a clever manipulation and the Pandavas were saved from extinction.

July 5, 1986

Company of the pious is beneficial 5.16

What purpose do the scriptural injunctions serve if we are drowned in the ocean of misery, inspite of taking all

steps to follow them strictly? Many people seek to know the answer to this question. They feel that it is unnecessary for them to go through the rigours of religious discipline if they always face unhappiness and sorrow. One thing should be clearly understood that there should be no intermingling of the acts that they had committed earlier and the modes of devotion that they presently adopt.

The exercises they conduct like meditation, worship and charity, will certainly fetch them the benefits, whether they desire them or not. They will obtain wealth and occupy covetable positions and during such times, they should serve God and humanity,instead of turning arrogant, forgetting the old days. But whoever they may be, the consequences of past mistakes, committed intentionally or without knowledge, will certainly visit them. They have to bear the grief with fortitude, reposing confidence in the Almighty and continuing their pious deeds without let-up.

The results of past sins cannot be offset by the good that accrues from the present. Submission to the Divine is a propitiatory factor which is bound to mitigate the suffering. But a most fruitful step they can adopt is to mingle only with the virtuous and ever be in the midst of saintly souls who will lead them in the direction of God's abode. They should also honour Vedic scholars. Like the one who has eaten beyond his requirement will suffer from indigestion, and has to bear the stomach ache, what flows out of having done prohibited acts should necessarily be personally experienced.

In his Mahabharatam discourse, Sri N. Babu Dikshitar referred to the tendency among those who go through

vicissitudes to presume that they have been singled out to face problems and think that others are happy and prosperous. They may curse God and ask why they should obey the Divine rules. Having reached a stage when they could not further bear the agony of life in the forest, the Pandavas were disheartened. To boost their morale, a sage narrated the story of emperor Nala, who unlike the five brothers who had the privilege to be in their midst, of sages, and enjoy certain comforts was all alone and was reduced to the position of a cook by quirk of fate. Dharma protected him and he emerged victorous from several ordeals. In his life, he observed the code of good conduct. Even while gambling he never adopted deceitful means.

July 22, 1986

Spiritual gains will be lasting 5.17

In every man's life, a particular event is being reckoned as the "most auspicious". A wealthy man cannot forget the day when he came to possess money and a scholar the occasion when he gained distinction. But in spiritual life, there are certain outstanding happenings which fetch him joy. The sacred texts mention about the significance of taking bath in the various rivers which are considered holy. Such dips are even "commands" relating to religious duties. Among these rivers, the Ganga is considered to be the most sacred. Having a bath in the river in Varanasi and worshipping Lord Vishwanatha are described as extremely important. In days of yore, those who were not able to fulfil this obligation believed it to be a privilege even to worship those who had performed this task. Such was the sanctity attached to this tradition. But this custom is now waning and people think that a visit to

foreign countries is holier than adhering to such practices. Traditions ought not to be disrespected. To say the least, disrespect to our ancient wisdom is nothing but a sacrilege.

Sri Bharathi Thirtha Swami of Sringeri in a lecture said, the second obiter dictum in the scriptures, to be taken as "extremely propitious" is to study the Mahabharatam, atleast once in one's life time. Other scriptural texts are also equally precious. In this Epic, all guidelines are laid down to enable a man to get rid of his sins and to lead a life righteousness. He can avoid pitfalls and receive Divine guidance. The Yaksha episode, Dhowmya's advice, Vidhura Neethi and Bhishma's statements, not to mention Bhagavad Gita, contained in it, are all valuable lessons for man to secure moral power. The third suggestion is intended for all, the rich and the have-nots, that the former should be liberal and give charity to genuine causes and the latter should help such people in the discharge of their duties and also themselves follow the scriptural injunctions. Failure to do the same is wrong and the concerned ought to be thrown into the sea with millstones round their necks, as Vidhura has said. People should perform, religious rites and observe austerities, divert their senses towards worship, praise, and offer service to God. Material pleasures will get no return when life ends whereas spiritual gains will fetch prosperity, peace and other rewards in man's rebirth.

December 11, 1986

Work is worship 5.18

The motto "Work is worship" is the very basis of Hinduism. Whatever may be the sphere of activity of a person,

he is expected to discharge his obligations to the best of his ability, honestly, diligently and as dedication to the Almighty. Every act should be governed by absolute rectitude. A person should feel that the work he undertakes has been entrusted to him by God and that the latter, seated in his heart, is closely watching his attitude, whether he is corrupt or attempts to cheat others. If this righteous conduct is integrated with his day-to-day activities, there will be no disharmony in his life. Such a deep and total involvement in his work, backed by righteousness, is termed Dharma. Adoption of this code by everyone, in each deed, will remove selfishness and pave the way for a pure and well-balanced existence.

The Mahabharatam illustrates this through the story of an ascetic who did penance for several years, unconcerned about the happenings around him. The result was that birds began to build their nests on the matted locks of hair on his head. The sage turned proud of his meditation and felt that he alone had conducted such severe austerities and there was none to equal his achievements.

One of the birds told him that his "achievement" was nothing when compared to a person living in a particular village. Though he considered it beneath his dignity to verify this, yet curiosity made him leave the forest and go to the hamlet. The man mentioned by the bird was none but an ordinary grocer who on seeing the ascetic enquired how he was able to leave the woods. The sage was shocked at his power of pre-emption and asked him how he came to know about his antecedents, more so when he was in a remote corner inside a dense forest, far away from civilisation. "What steps did you take to achieve the ability". he asked.

The trader lifted the balance with which he weighed the goods he sold to the public and said - "This is my God from whom I have derived the power". He said he never used

false weights, never cheated anyone, was absolutely honest in his dealings and treated all the customers alike. "My anxiety is to be fair to everyone and rely on God for the profit. He gives, with which I am contended. I know no Mantra." "Swadharma" implies carrying out one's duties as offering and service to God. In the Gita, the Lord has declared. "Whatever you do, dedicate the same to me". Sri Vishwesha Thirtha pointed out in a discourse.

October 17, 1987

Gratitude and attitude to wrong 5.19

Divine Law is supreme and Justice administered by God is unquestionable. Punishment is bound to be given to the guilty and no one can escape its clutches, however eminent the culprit in his personal life, may be. Remaining oblivious to a crime perpetrated in one's very presence is also a crime and those who do so will have to undergo the sentence. Even in olden days, some people used to be on the side of those who had enormous powers, maintaining silence even when Moral Law was violated. Expediency made them connive at such improper acts. Some took shelter under the very same Divine Law but giving their own interpretation.

In the Mahabaratham, even the stalwart and astute Bhishma who advised the blind king Dhritarashtra, took the strange stance that he should be grateful to those who provided him food. He was a mute spectator of the heinous act of the wicked group led by Duryodhana in trying to strip a chaste woman in public. He should have stopped this immoral deed but perhaps he did not want to be branded as an ingrate. No doubt gratitude should be displayed but not when such

ignoble deeds were carried out. Such men deserved punishment and God made them suffer. The Pandavas adhered to the Divine Law and received God's guidance and were victorious.

In a discourse, Sri S. Jayarama Sarma referred to the question posed by some whether Lord Krishna was justified in ordering Arjuna to kill others and whether this was not unbecoming of the Almighty. God can never commit wrong, Did not Arjuna indulge in killing sprees on earlier occasions? He suddenly decided to stop fighting when the Kurukshetra war was to commence. This time he was grieved at facing his own relatives. Attachment made him resist and it was then that Lord Krishna delivered the message making him realise that he was duty-bound to take part in the battle as a Kshatriya and that his action should not be result-oriented when God will take care of the rest. There should be no room for emotional upheavals. God's advice (the Song-Celestial) had its impact and Arjuna and his brothers emerged triumphant.

January 22, 1990

Bold adviser to erring emperor 5.20

There may be a few persons who can fearlessly tender advice to erring individuals and those holding power but are prone to misuse their positions. By virtue of their own impeccable character, these few have the right but invariably may remain unconcerned about atrocities being committed by some. Though such upright men may point out the facts boldly, fewer will be the number who will listen to their suggestions and follow them. But sincere as they are, these men of virtue, unmindful

of consequences will not fail to sound the note of caution, whether it is welcomed or disliked.

In the Mahabharatham, Vidhura, who is portrayed as the symbol of righteousness, has expounded the code of conduct, to the blind king Dhritarashtra whose mind was immersed in confusion, unable to distinguish between the good and the evil. Attachment made him indirectly support the evil designs of his sons. Vidhura did not hesitate to tell him, at every opportune moment, that he should give back the territory to his brother's sons, the Pandavas.

Sri Vishwapriya Thirtha Swami in his discourse referred to Vidhura's wise counsel to shed jealousy. There may be nothing wrong in displaying a competitive spirit and start emulating the example of a boy who stands first in the class but there should be no malice towards him or at those who are prosperous, well-placed or wealthy. It will be scorched-earth policy to bring down intelligent people to a lower level. The emphasis should be to make those in the lower rungs to rise to higher levels.

We may turn envious at those who conduct worship of God with sincerity and feel inwardly sorry that we are not able to display such devotion. Patience, humility and forgiveness should also be assiduously cultivated as they are noble traits. What should be considered outstanding in a man is that in spite of his possessing enormous physical strength to meet any challenge, his capacity to excuse even the spineless men who not aware of their limitations dare attack. Nothing can be a failure when a person puts his sincere efforts to complete a task and also seek Divine guidance. The gift of God will always be available to those who display their anxiety to achieve success in their endeavour. Vidhura explained the

necessity for a man to curb his desires and develop detachment and cited the early days of Drona who lived on grains which had fallen on the field after a harvest.

February 26, 1990

All actions governed by Divine sanction 5.21

All religious-minded and God-fearing men are fully conscious of the fact that their actions are governed by His decisions. Nothing in this world can take place without Divine sanction. Out of mercy, God supplies all the needs of His devotees and takes care of them. They are quite aware that all happenings are for good. God has also prescribed the method to obtain His grace - by giving up attachment, avoiding desire and shedding ego.

There is an anecdote of a prince and his friend on a hunting spree in a forest. The former shot a tiger but in the process lost a finger. The friend said it was for good, which annoyed the prince who pushed him into a well, taking his remark as an insult. The companion said this too would do him good. Within a few minutes, the prince was caught by bandits for being offered in a sacrifice. At the last moment, they discovered his handicap of a missing finger and released him because the ritual would not permit a disfigured man being offered. The prince went to the well, rescued his friend and expressed regret for his rash act. Asked how this could be taken as a blessing in disguise, the friend said that if he had accompanied the prince, he would have been sacrificed as he did not have any disablement.

Sri, A.S. Baitmangalkar in a discourse, said any amount of human ingenuity cannot convert salt into sweet. This should make one realise God's supreme powers. God is the indweller of all creations, directing them every minute and guiding their activities. He controls all their actions and if this is understood by men, all problems can be overcome. What the human being should do is to discard desires, eschew malice, refrain from hating others and shun ego. These in turn, could be achieved acquiring spiritual knowledge. Wants have no limits but man should endeavour to curb them and develop detachment towards worldly objects.

Duryodhana was a typical example of how pride would destroy a man. He was full of malice and God made the special rite he performed to counter the one conducted by Yudhishtirar, a waste. God stations Himself in the hearts of devotees. Perverted egoism will vanish as soon as transcendental knowledge dawns upon a person. He can then withstand the forceful impulses born of lust and anger.

May 2, 1990

Forgive and be Divine 5.22

To forget a harm done to us or an injury deliberately inflicted on us is a rare trait. But it is extremely scarce to come across persons who completely forget the very incident and hence such a gesture should be considered as Divine.

It is impossible even to imagine that a character in one of our scriptures recommended that a culprit, who beheaded

five children at one stroke, be excused. The person who committed such a crime did so, not to achieve any personal gain but only to take revenge on those who were successful in wiping out the evil forces with whom he was associated. He did not hail from the warrior group but was the son of a respected teacher. Punishment in such instances should indeed be more condign. But the affected person was considerate to him because the Law of Righteousness prohibited extreme penalty in respect of this category of men.

This noble act was displayed by Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas whose children were wiped out by Aswathama, son of Drona, the ace archer-tutor. No doubt she was deeply distressed at the massacre but when she knew that the killer was none else than the son of a preceptor, she pleaded with her husbands to let him go with a mild punishment as it was a sin to offend the Acharya or his wards.

Sri Krishna Premi in a discourse said, though the Kurukshetra war was over, Yudhistirar's mind remained agitated over, the tragic consequences and he sought solace from Sri Krishna. Surprisingly the Lord was Himself in a pensive mood and when questioned about the need for His meditation when the universe prostrated at His feet, He mentioned about His concern for a great devotee-Bhishma, the repository of wisdom, who was awaiting the final call from heaven. The Pandavas were led by the Lord to the place where he was resting, Bhishma then gave a dissertation about Righteousness and Duty. He said Destiny alone was responsible for all the happenings and his anguish. Even after his coronation, Yudhishtirar issued orders only after obtaining the blind king's approval. The Pandavas treated him with utmost courtesy and behaved well towards him. Yudhishtirar was however unhappy over the belated disclosure by his mother that Karna was his elder brother and regretted that if only this secret

had only been revealed earlier, the tragedy (of war) could have been averted.

January 14, 1991

Epic heroine purified in flames 5.23

The propagation of the ideals concerning character -building, developing the quality of contentment and maintaining religious discipline as prescribed in Divine commands is the basic and common feature contained in all the scripturaal texts. Towards this purpose, the sacred books have detailed - through the heroes, heroines and other actors, what man should do and what he should avoid to enable him to reach the goal of liberation from the cycle of rebirths.

By the study of the conduct of these personalities, it will be possible for a sincere person to tread the Divine path. To realise how the manner in which the Pandavas faced trials, still clinging on to the rules of virtuous conduct, helps one to refrain from flouting them but uphold them even at the cost of personal inconvenience.

The embodiment of patience and tolerance, Yudhishtirar maintained equanimity even when provoked. Bhima's life tells us of the value of restraint and listening to his valiant deeds will remove sins. Enemies will vanish if Arjuna's acts are kept in mind. No ailment will afflict people when they hear the contribution made by Nakula and Sahadeva. The Pandavas stood united and their opponents who thought of creating a rift among them realised how ridiculous was their move. An ideal wife, Draupadi helped them in all their noble pursuits.

The Mahabaratam presents a riddle through her marriage to five, but the circumstances under which this was forced on them, have been suitably explained. As she stayed with each one of them she got purified in flames. (This is the background for the fire-walking ceremony in temples dedicated to her even now).

Sri. S.B. Kalyanarama Bhattachariar in his discourse mentioned about the concern expressed by Gandhari (who voluntarily remained blindfolded as an act of reverence to her spouse, the blind emperor) about Draupadi's safety in the presence of her son Duryodhana. She felt that her charm might tempt him to injure her. Likewise Dhritarashtra too made the five brothers rule a separate territory lest his son should, out of malice and jealousy, cause them disturbance. A note of caution was uttered to the Pandavas by sage Narada about Draupadi's presence among all of them by reminding them of the story of two brothers who were intimate but got mutually wiped out when both claimed the affection of a woman.

January 26, 1991

Virtue is the shield of man 5.24

A person cannot be termed wealthy only because of his valuable property or other type of possessions. He, to whom, the agreeable and unlikeable, weal and woe, the past and the future, are the same and are of no difference or of no consequence can be considered to have every kind of wealth. It should have been used for noble and genuine causes. He will have to treat sorrow and happiness alike. Child Prahlada's grim determination and assertion that God will not allow His devotee to experience grief will make others maintain equipoise. He saw God everywhere and in everything.

"Man" in the strict sense of the term and on proper and deep analysis will apply to one whose fame spreads on earth and even reaches heaven because of his pious deeds. Many have left monumental structures and other community (social) welfare projects for posterity and their names remain for ever

A king who had reached paradise and returned to the world was struck by the words of gratitude of a turtle which remained in a tank, reminding him that it was built by him to mark the conclusion of his special religious rite. Water from it was being utilised for irrigation, it added.

There was another instance of a noble man who was detained in hell just for a few seconds for a very minor lapse, before being led to the Divine kingdom. His presence in the hell brought so much of peace among others already pushed in there that they preferred his stay with them. The pious man replied that should he be the source of solace for others, he would not mind living with them. Such was the nature of sacrifice in days of yore.

In his Mahabharatham discourse, Sri N. Lakshminarasimhan referred to the manner in which Yudhishtirar answered all the questions with humility raised by a celestial (Yaksha), thereby enabling his brothers, who fell unconscious after drinking the water of an enchanted pool, contrary to a strict warning, to regain normality. Yudhishtirar declared that virtue is the shield of man. If its rules are upheld strictly, it will protect us, if they are contravened, it will destroy us. "Never should we renounce righteousness" was his unequivocal statement.

January 22, 1992

Adopt law with faith and firmness 5.25

Birth in this world, in whatever from it may be, is the result of one's past acts. The consequences for these deeds in previous lives, good as well as bad, ought to be experienced. No one can avoid them nor can escape from them. But God provides opportunities for those born as human beings, to desist from repeating them now, so that there will be freedom from re-birth. What should be done for securing it has been detailed in the scriptural authority. In brief, "Uphold Divine Law to the best of your ability" is the main directive given. The study of the Mahabharatham will enable a sincere person to understand what should be done and what ought to be rejected

In this context, the word "Dharma" assumes great significance because it alone sustains every activity. Broadly, it can be defined as "Virtue or Righteousness" though there are several other connotations. Should a shape be given to it to enable men to see and realise its significance, the Lord in His incarnations as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna are, by themselves, the best examples.

Since it would be improper on His part to preach the ideals set in His law and since it is possible that men may not care to take His words seriously when He assumes a human form, God thought it proper to disseminate truth and real import of His various commands, through sages, saints and other representative. In the Mahabharatham, He made Bhishma, the grandsire, spell out and expound the nuances and subtelities of the Divine utterances.

Sri Mukkur Lakshminarasimhachariar in a discourse said, even listening to the endeavour taken by some, to strictly observe the Divine Law, or seeing those who take pains to

perform the acts mentioned thereunder, or meeting people who give encouragement or render assistance towards the pious people who are zealous in safeguarding the Law, will fetch good. Contrariwise even coming across evil elements who flout it or who ridiculel those who follow the rules of Righteousness is considered a sin.

No doubt Bhishma was a scholar and a seasoned leader, still his presence when Draupadi was being disrobed in a public place by wicked men, was to be condemned. What the Epic pinpoints is that it may be easy for anyone to sermonise about character and good habits but extremely exacting in practising the prescribed steps to maintain them, "Adopt the Law with faith and firmness" the episodes point out.

August 5, 1992

Guidelines for man's good conduct 5.26

There may be found a person who enjoys all the objects of the Senses. He is intelligent. The world holds him in esteem. He is popular. He is wealthy and yet he may be considered not alive. A reply to this riddle contained in one of the epics says that in spite of all these assets, a man who definitely breathes, is said to be "dead" when he does not offer anything to God, guests, servants and parents.

Scriptures have assigned specific duties to all sections of humanity. Some have been asked to acquire spiritual knowledge, serve society, cultivate humility, shed ego and show compassion to all. They should consider themselves as tools used by God to carry out His commands and never imagine that even the little they have achieved is due to their own efforts. On the

other hand, they should realise that God had made them do these tasks. Their prayers should be to plead with God to grant them the power to rigorously follow what He had ordered to be done. Another group, according scriptures, ought to safeguard the country's borders.

The Mahabharatam incorporates a lesson through a dialogue between the main character Yudhishtira and a celestial. The latter warned four of the five Pandavas not to taste the water of an enchanted pool. Defying this, they entered into it to quench their thirst. They fell unconscious. Yudhishtira alone obeyed and answered the questions raised by the celestial and got his brothers revived. Called Yaksha-Prasna, these exchanges cover all guidelines for man's good conduct. These were explained by Sri.V.S.Karunakaran in his discourses.

Steady intelligence serves man as a helpful companion. Always more praiseworthy than earth is one's mother who has gone through enormous sacrifice to bring up her children, the wife is the friend bestowed on man by God; charity is the intimate associate of a person and so, to the extent possible, he should donate to genuine causes without hesitation; of all possessions, knowledge is the most valuable, sound health is the best of all gains, contentment provides all the happiness a man needs; forgiveness consists in enduring enmity; anger is man's invincible enemy; covetousness is an incurable disease; he who desires the good of all creatures is honest; by destroying miserlines, one can remain happy; the man to whom the agreeable and the unlikeable, weal and woe, the past and the future are the same, is considered to possess every kind of wealth.

January 18, 1993

Time on earth too brief to be wasted 5.27

The purpose of human life is to see that a person, granted this precious gift, liberates himself from re-birth. Sages, through valuable contributions, have given advice on how to conduct oneself to achieve this goal. One of their suggestions refers to the nature of "Time". It does not wait for anyone. Every minute takes a man towards his end. Time flies and so any one born in this world ought to realise that one should not waste even a second.

But a common man allows himself to be lured pleasures, misses his goal and returns to the universe only to further get entangled in pleasures and face the consequences. On the other hand, men who take to religious exercises will be aware of the brief time at their disposal. What happens to a person the next day, if not the next hour, cannot be predicted by him. He cannot also get back lost time, because the life-span gets diminished.

Involved in worldly activities and free from anxieties, man is not concerned with the factor. "Time", which consumes him. When he is struck by grief, he understands, the value of Time. Apostles have prayed to God that they reach His kingdom soon, avoiding the pulls of pleasures and stay in this world for long.

The Mahabharatham narrates how a king got himself entangled in family life as a result of which he forgot the years he had spent with a bewitching woman of his choice. She had married him on the understanding that he would not question her acts. But a stage arrived when he could not but seek her explanation why she had thrown seven of their children in a river in succession and might have done the same thing to the other child also. Then the woman,

a human form of the Ganga (river), mentioned about the curse that eight celestials suffered. She took the last child with her, gave training in all arts, brought him back groomed as an extraordinary person and left him in his father's care. He was later known as Bhishma, who served as the link between the two warring factions, Pandavas and Kauravas.

This story reminds posterity of the purity of the Ganga as it flows down the plains and that even now godly souls reside on its banks (some unseen) doing penance. Adi Sankara has rendered a hymn "Gangashtakam" describing it as a pathway to obtain salvation, said Sri B. Sundarkumar in a discourse. Residing in sacred centres and taking bath in holy rivers will help cleanse our minds. Only when the mind is kept clean, can we devote our attention on God and meditate on Him. As steps have been prescribed in our spiritual literature to face challenges (like being conscious of the value of time), it is easy for us to adopt them and hold on to the feet of the Lord.

June 29, 1994

Man must seek liberation 5.28

The nature of human beings can be easily assessed from their reactions when they commit mistakes. Some can be categorised as the worst because having committed a criminal act, they will shift the blame on others. Some will do wrong but not accept them. The third category will admit their faults only when threatened or thrashed. The fourth group will meekly submit having done the misdeed. (when confronted) But there are some extraordinary characters who will even own responsibility for the misdeeds committed by others. Two examples are of Bhishma and Bharata.

Yet another moral rule is the crime arising out of abetting a sin committed by some one known or remaining unconcerned when mischief is being done instead of preventing it or punishing the culprit. Bhishma felt that he had shirked from his moral duty when the Kauravas resorted to heinous deeds. In this connection despicable crimes committed by bad elements which need no investigation but for which capital punishment is the only remedy have been singled out in the codes of conduct. These crimes are to set houses aflame, kill by administering poison, carry arms to attack men, grab the lands held by others and to covet women other than their wives.

Manu, the Law-giver, says men who were found to have resorted to even one among them, deserve death penalty. Imagine, some crooks having mercilessly combined all of them. Duryodhana and his associates set fire to the wax palace where their cousins were staying, caused poisonous snakes to bite Bhima, attacked them through weapons, took away their kingdom and property by deceit and disgraced Draupadi in public.

Sri Mukkur Lakshminarasimhachariar, in a discourse referred to Bhishma's regret while rendering an exposition on "Virtue" to the Pandavas at the end of the Kurukshetra war. He said the only way to get all our sins wiped out and obtain liberation is to cling to the feet of the Lord. Even the hands of the Almighty had been used on a few occasions to punish the wicked. Man toils for family throughout his life but when he gets old and is found unfit, he may be despised by kith and kin. The Lord is the only refuge.

September 2, 1994

Vidhura Needhi, code of conduct for all 5.29

The victim of adverse fate will first become perverted, utterly losing his sense of right and wrong. His power of judgement destroyed by Time, the all powerful, he will act in a way which will lead him to ruin.

The above mentioned warning was tendered by an elder statesman to an emperor who had allowed his wicked sons to misbehave with a woman and adopt deceitful means to win the men whom they hated. The Mahabharata, in which this scene is enacted, reveals that distrust and anger breed contempt for those who are powerful and who have valour and wisdom. The result was the attempt to do away with such men.

When those wedded to virtue are driven to the edge, they will be inclined to feel that they have been singled out by God for such treatment. The Pandavas, who were forced to lead lives of ordinary citizens, were demoralised and so sought the advice of sages, who narrated to them episodes in which men of equal eminence, if not more sagacious, had to go through indescribable privations but still did not lose their courage. That even men full of vicious thoughts will not hesitate to seek solace when they face problems, from wise men, is shown in the Epic by the manner in which the blind king approached his close friend and adviser Vidhura. The king feared the day when the Pandavas would return from exile. He spent a whole night listening to Vidhura's exposition on morals and code of conduct, Pandit V. Natesanar said in a lecture.

According to Vidhura, administration should be entrusted to competent and knowledgeable persons. The assets of a

wise one who aspires for higher ideals are forbearance, exertion and steadiness in virtue. He will carry out duties which he knows will be within his capacity. His actions and plans will not be disclosed to others until they are accomplished. He will not be affected by honours or by slights. For a foolish man, scripture is a closed book.

Poison kills only one man who consumes it and so does a weapon but wicked counsel destroys an entire kingdom. Supreme peace is forgiveness and supreme happiness is benevolence. A ruler should never confer with men of small sense, those who procrastinate, the indolent and the sycophants, should avoid drowsiness, fear, anger and arrogance and never forsake truth, charity, diligence and patience. When a person dies, only his merits and sins will accompany him. Asceticism, self-restraint, knowledge, sacrifice, pure marriages and gifts of food are the hallmarks of a noble family. The advice of Vidhura, is a treatise on Virtue embedded in the Epic. Still the blind king's mind remained clouded.

August 8, 1995

Discharge duties with equanimity of mind 5.30

Devotion to God is neither mere emotional rapture nor does it imply an extravagant or pompous show during worship. It cannot be assessed by mere external features of a man like his donning an ochre robe or wearing of caste marks. These alone cannot certify a person as highly religious. They are no doubt necessary but what distinguishes saintly men from others is their contentment and ever remaining free

from depression or elation. Their joy arises in discharging their spiritual obligations with genuine interest and with the feeling that they merely carry out God's orders. They will thus be clearly identified by their detached attitude.

Some devotees who may be enjoying prosperity blame God when they pass through difficulties in life. Such men do not for a moment think about the cause for their grief. If they do so, they will realise that they have come to suffer by virtue of their own misdeeds. But, why should even saintly men and those who sincerely uphold the Divine commandments be made to face problems? In the case of such highly evolved souls, scriptures say that their grief is the result of their past acts. Saintly men will realise that the tests given to them are intended to wipe out the consequences of past sins. The good that they have done will fetch them rich dividends.

Hence God should never be blamed. He is impartial and acts like a teacher who shows no favouritism though one among his pupils comes out with flying colours while another obtains only average marks. Scriptures say that trials devotees undergo gradually diminish the impact of sins. The good they do will accumulate and they are bound to emerge successful in the end.

The Mahabharata relates how the Pandavas who were virtuous had to undergo grief almost continuously to the extent of demoralising them at one stage. But the symbol of patience, Yudhishtira advised the others to bear the trials with fortitude. In his discourse, Sri N. Babu Dikshitar explained how another severe challenge was thrown before them when Sage Durvasa, known for his short temper egged on by their foes, demanded lunch for himself and his huge retinue at an odd hour. Even then, Yudhishtira maintained his calm and Draupadi prayed to God to save them from this grim situation. When Lord Krishna appeared and partook the tiny

bit of curry leaf sticking to the vessel that was given to her by the Sun God, the sage and his men felt that they had been fed and apologised for having caused inconvenience to them.

One more test was in the form of a Yaksha (a celestial who remained unseen) to whom belonged a pool from which four of the brothers drank water not heeding a warning and collapsed, Yudhishtira cleared all the doubts of the Yaksha and brought back his brothers to life.

April 20, 1996

Freedom from bondage: Srimad Andavan's advice 6.1

The grace of Bhagawan alone can release a person from the shackles of samsara. True knowledge about Paramatma liberates the jiva from all kinds of bondage. On the other hand, avidya (maya) gets the jiva engulfed in samsara.

In a discourse Tirukkudanthai Srimad Andavan Swami said, this truth was exemplified in Krishna Avatar. When the Lord was born as the eighth child to Vasudeva and Devaki, who were held in captivity by Kamsa, the locks of the prison broke down to enable the Divine child to be carried to Gokulam as ordained by Bhagawan Himself. However, when Vasudeva, after leaving Sri. Krishna in Gokulam brought back a female child born to Nanda (cowherd chief) to take the place of Sri Krishna, the doors of the jail got closed and locked of their own accord. This was symbolic of the fact that when the jiva was associated with Bhagawan and had knowledge of him, it would be freed from all bonds. But as soon as avidya (maya), commonly represented by a female of the species, entered, the jiva would get involved in samsara.

The relationship between jiva and avidya is comparable to the one between fire and smoke, mirror and dust, and foetus and womb. Just as smoke envelopes fire, avidya clouds the jiva. Though carefully protected and cleaned constantly, a sheet of glass becomes dusty in no time. Even so, with the best of efforts, a person may not succeed in getting rid of avidya, which has a tendency to attach itself to jiva again and again. It is only with the grace of God, that the foetus gets separated from the mother's uterus, to which it remained attached for months, and is delivered into earth. Similarly,

the jiva, which has intimately attached itself to avidya, requires the grace of God to free itself from it.

Though there are many differences between Krishna Avatar and Rama Avatar, there is one element in common. In both the Avatars, the Lord first kills women (Thataka in Rama Avatar and Putana in the Krishna's Avatar) illustrating that avidya is the first enemy to the realisation of God.

According to Visishtadwaita, the Lord showed His full form (with four arms, the conch, the mace, etc.) to a true devotee. Yasodha saw Lord Vishnu in miniature in child Krishna and called the womenfolk of Gokulam to share her joy and have dharshan; but, to others Sri Krishna was visible in the ordinary human form.

June 19, 1964

Expiation of sin 6.2

To repent for a sin is itself an expiatory act. Only persons who are inherently good will have the penitent attitude. They will be pleased to suffer any punishment that may be inflicted on them for the wrongs they may have done, as that will relieve them of the mental torment. Parikshit was not at all angry when he was told of the curse that he would die on the seventh day from then, bitten by the serpent-king Takshaka. This, he felt, he deserved for the sin he had committed in throwing a dead serpent around the neck of a sage in meditation.

In his discourse, Sri Sengalipuram Anantarama Dikshitar said, though an ardent devotee of Sri Krishna and a great respecter of Dharmam, Parikshit committed the grievous mistake in a weak moment, impelled by anger and vanity. Ruminating over the incident at leisure, the king was greatly distressed that he, the guardian of the people, should have wronged a Bhagavata an act only a knave is capable of. He feared some catastrophe would befall his kingdom because of this. While the king himself felt he deserved the penalty, the sage blamed his son (who gave the curse), for imposing a severe punishment on a God-fearing virtuous king for a small error. He prayed to God that his son might be pardoned for his act.

With only seven days left for his death, Parikshit realised that he should devote himself to the means of reaching God's feet. Immediately he renounced everything, went to the southern bank of the Ganges, sat on Kusa grass and resolved never to take food. Suka, son of Sage Vyasa, arrived there and related to him the purana, Srimad Bhagavatam, in the presence of an august assembly of sages. To Parikshit, who asked if seven days were enough to attain moksha, Suka said even a muhurta was sufficient and cited the instance of Katvanga to instil confidence in him.

January 9, 1965

Pathway to everlasting bliss 6.3

Desire is the prime motive force for human actions. Any appeal to an ordinary man to give up desire, do the karmas without longing for the fruits and surrender himself to God will not carry conviction easily. The kamya karmas (desire-

impelled acts) are intended to create faith in God and initiate a person into the path of devotion. Gradually, he would himself realise the fleeting nature of worldly pleasures and be inducted to cling to the Lord's feet and aspire for everlasting bliss by doing nishkamya karmas.

Sri Umayalpuram R. Sivarama Sastrigal said that the provocation for Dhruva resorting to penance with a remarkable tenacity was the denial by his stepmother (Suruchi) of his right to sit on the lap of his father (King Uthanapada). The self-conceited Suruchi told him that, to become eligible for it, he should perform tapas, obtain God's grace, and be born to her. Urged by the desire to win his rightful status, Dhruva was determined to seek His benignancy. His mother (Suneeti) also blessed him for success in his efforts, as advised by Narada, who taught him for Dwadasakshara Mantra and the method of doing tapas. At the end of five months of rigorous penance Sri Narayana granted darshan to him.

April 24, 1965

Triple pathway to Salvation 6.4

Unswerving devotion, characterised by unflinching dedication and absolute faith in God's unbounded power will take one towards goal of Salvation. Remembrance of God's supremacy and offering prayers to Him even for a few minutes at the time of one's last breath will fetch him redemption.

Sri G.N. Jayathirthachar in his discourse said Sukacharya answered a number of queries of King Pareekshit, before he commenced reciting Srimad Bhagavatham. Since the time at an individual's disposal during his existence in the world

was very little, he should choose the path of devotion even from the early stages. He has to develop the quality of detachment to wordly pleasures. A wife was not a companion for ever since none knows who she was in her previous birth nor guess who she would be in her next. Suka recalled the episode of a king, who aware of his death in a few hours, started concentrating on God and got Moksha. To practise concentration, one should snap all earthly ties, control his thoughts and worship Him constantly either through His gigantic idol forms (Sthoolarupa) or by "imprisoning" His dazzling figure (Sookshamarupa) within one's tiny heart. Even in a short time after Bhagavatham was chanted. King Pareekshit experienced the presence of God inside him. The proof of His having entered our hearts would be reflected by the ecstacy and thrill obtained and the attainment of a state of bliss where external influences would not affect us and our thoughts would remain fixed.

In each of His incarnations, God's multitudinous qualities such as valour, knowledge, benevolence, etc. would shine but one among them would shed greater lustre. As Kapila, God showed His intellectual superiority by expounding the Sankhya philosophy which in essence highlighted the value of association with good men, the need to cut off wordly bonds and the efficacy of chanting God's glory, through which one could attain mental peace.

September 22, 1965

Spirit of devotion necessary to cultivate Bhakti 6.5

Let not the power of speech be wasted showering undeserved encomiums on ordinary human beings either in anticipation

of or in return for small favours. The tongue should be employed in chanting incessantly the glorious names of God and offering garlands of praise Him, after receiving instruction from one's acharya. Knowledge of the Vedas and the scriptures, acquired solely through books without the aid of a teacher, will only lead to misunderstanding and perversion. It will be as meaningless as music learnt by postal tuition. As a purana which speaks of nothing but the Paramatma, His incarnations, His attributes, and the method of reaching Him - Srimad Bhagavatham occupies the pride of place.

In his discourse Sri Manjakkudi Rajagopala Sastrigal said the first three verses contained in a nutshell the subject matter and the greatness of the Purana. The first sloka, the corner-stone on which the entire edifice has been built, describes by way of paying respect to Him, the Almighty as a Satya Swarupa who has neither origin nor end, in Whom resides the sentient and non-sentient creatures of the universe and Whose association makes everything appear real. It is the writing of this scripture - juice from a ripe of fruit in the tree of Vedas-that gave mental tranquility to the disturbed mind of Sage Vyasa.

A person may be well-versed in the Vedas and the Shastras, meticulous in performing the rituals stipulated in the scriptures and also be a storehouse of all virtues - truthfulness, charitability compassion, righteousness, etc. But if he lacked the spirit of devotion, all of them would be shorn of their glory. Skyhigh temple towers, rich in architectural beauty and aesthetic excellence, will at best serve as show-pieces, if there is no deity in the sanctum sanctorun. It is the presence of God's image that lends meaning, significance and importance to a temple and makes it a place of worship. So is Bhakti to other rituals.

To bring out the greatness of devotion, Narada narrated to Vyasa his own story - how in his previous birth he imbibed

the spirit of bhakti by listening to the exposition of the Lord's stories while assisting his mother. Even a recluse will eagerly lend his ears to anecdotes relating to God. Suka, a sanyasi to the core, who used to be always on the move, heard from his father, Vyasa, the entire Bhagavatham and in turn related it to King Parikshit for seven days.

January 29, 1966

Need to discard arrogance and pride 6.6

Lust and greed are the deadly evils which cloud our minds. When one cultivates an absolutely detached attitude towards worldly gains, develops the will-power to curb carnal pleasures, get rid of the desire to accumulate unbounded wealth and discard the habit of acquiring limitless movable and immovable property, his heart becomes thoroughly cleansed, making it fit for God to dwell for ever. God identifies Himself with such an ardent devotee, showering all His affection and protecting him for ever.

Sri Karpangadu Venkatachariar in his discourse referred to Narada's advice to Prachetasas which bore the stamp of pure Visishtadwaita philosophy. Acquisition of knowledge, performance of rites, strict practice of codes, vibrant talk and other such traits were of no avail if a person did not dedicate them all to Sri Vishnu the Supreme, the Immanent and the Infinite. Caught in the turmoil of life, man experienced severe distress, but all his troubles would vanish once he was able to differentiate between the body to which he clung with undue attachment, and the immaculate soul. Worship of Sri Vishnu would please all Gods as water poured at the root reached all parts of the tree.

None in this world was free from some kind of worry, but it should not prevent him from extending mercy to his fellow-beings. He should remain content with what God had provided him, and control his unbridled sensory organs particularly the tongue, which was most difficult to keep in check. Sometimes, those well-placed and occupying exalted positions, by virtue of their birth, or because of their wealth, or on account of their higher education or by their mastery over the scriptures, tended to become haughty, to the extent of even showing disregard to others equally well-versed and accomplished. Worship by them, marked by usual fanfare and pomp would not evoke any response from God, who would never grace persons who showed intellectual arrogance or exhibited pride.

February 2, 1966

Acquisition of knowledge from proper preceptor 6.7

Rigorous penance characterised by perfect control over the sensory organs and utmost concentration of mind on the nature of Self may make one a Yogi or even invest him with the power of performing superhuman miracles and of reading the past and forecasting the future with uncanny precision. In the same manner, thorough learning of the Scriptures and profundity of Vedantic knowledge may testify to one's scholarship. But unless commingled with single-minded devotion to God, none of these will lead to redemption of the individual soul from the bogging forces of samsara. As Sri Thyagaraja has sung, of what use is the erudition of one, who, styling himself a Guru, boasts of an army of disciples, if he has not won the grace of Sri Rama? (Emi jesithenemi Sri Ramaswami

Karunaleni). It is this path of Bhakti, easy but sure way to salvation, that has been delineated in the Bhagavatam.

In his discourse Sri, T.S.Balakrishna Sastrigal said that only knowledge acquired from a preceptor with a great apostolic lineage (Guruparampara) would be fruitful, quelling ignorance and bringing tranquillity to mind. Further, a Guru must be compassionate and willing to help his disciple enjoy the blissful experience of meditating on the enchanting form of God. As Parikshit was sitting on the bank of the Ganga, Suka who had learnt the secrets of Sri Narayana's incarnations from his father Vyasa arrived there to narrate the great Purana to the curse-afflicted king. The sage assured him that he need not be sceptical about the feasilibity of attaining Moksha in seven days for had not Katvanga secured that exalted status within a muhurta? What was important was not the length of time but Narayana Smriti (thought of Sri Narayana).

The lecturer said multiplication of wants always culminated in misery and dragged one deep into the whirl of samsara. Abstemiousness is a virtue not only in a Yogi but also in a Grihasta. Methods there are for propitiating demi-Gods like Indra, Surya, and Varuna, who are capable of dispensing small benefits. But an ardent devotee of Sri Narayana, with no attachment to worldly things though within a family, will seek nothing but the most cherished Moksha, in spite of the fact that he can get anything he wants. It is this mental attunement that one should endeavour to achieve. Suka after describing the Virat Purusha Swarupa of God, explained the eight angas of Yoga and how God created the Universe.

March 7, 1966

Road to Gnana: Need for desirelessness 6.8

Whoever gives up attachment to his sareera (body) will be absolutely indifferent to praise, abuse or ridicule. Neither pleasure nor pain will affect him. In the eyes of the world, he will look like a lunatic or an idiot. Having once experienced the pernicious influence of excessive attachment (towards a deer), Jadabharata took extraordinary care not to get involved any more in the mire of Samsara. He was quite unperturbed when a gang of thieves was about to offer him as a sacrifice to Goddess Kali. But Kali would not allow a noble and devoted soul to be harmed. While saving Jadabharata, She beheaded all the thieves as a punishment for their sinful designs.

Sir. P.P.Lakshminarayana Upadhyaya, in a discourse said if one tried to wrong a pious man he would himself come to grief. All efforts to hurt a person who clings to the lotus feet of Sri Narayana are sure to fail: for the Sudarsana Chakram of the Lord is ever ready to protect the devotees. Jadabharata explained to King Rahugana, to whom he happened to act as a palanquin-bearer, that mastery of the Vedas and other scriptures without Vairagya (Desirelessness) would not lead to Gnana.

The Shastras have prescribed specific acts as means of expiation for various sins. Those deeds would only wipe out the effects of the sins already committed, but not the Jiva's propensity to sin. The only way to eliminate it is to worship God with single-minded devotion, the lecturer said.

Describing the episode of Ajamila, the sinner who escaped perdition by uttering the word "Narayana" at the time of his death, lecturer said the Purana merely mentioned that he was beckoning his dear son by the name "Narayana" and

had no idea of invoking God. Unaccompanied by the thought of God (Smarana), the name would not save one from the ill-effects of sins or ensure liberation, Gnana is essential for attaining Moksha, he said.

August 12, 1966

Help of qualified preceptor essential for God realisation 6.9

Doubts and confusion relating to philosophic doctrines often arise due to misinterpretation of texts and persistent claims by some misguided, who may be illequipped. Through indoctrination, they may make even falsehood appear true. Friends of an honest man, intending to fool him, stationed themselves at intervals of space and as he passed them, carrying a lamb on his shoulders, each one of them in an identical strain, explained why he should burden himself with a fowl. In the beginning he refuted this statement, but by the time he reached the end of his journey, he was convinced that all of them could not be wrong and believing their words to be correct, threw away the animal. One, who is desirous of realising God, should remember that the body is perishable, while the soul is immutable, capable of transmigration. Never should there be a mistake that the Atma and the Sareera are same. The Atma should be kept pure, unaffected by external influences. God-realisation is possible only through the knowledge imparted by a qualified preceptor and not through personal efforts. Even as dried shrubs on a land, to be utilised for cultivation, are cleared easily by setting fire to them, the impurities in the mind can be incinerated by the flames of "Gnana". This was the essence of the message delivered by

Jadabharata, king - turned - saint, who remained impervious to physical attacks and to criticisms about his detached attitude and his indolence.

In his discourse Sri. Uthamur T. Veeraraghavachariar said Ajamila, a pious person, turned bad by virtue of evil association, while on his death-bed called his son, "Narayana". God's messengers drove away Yama's attendants who had come to take away his life. On his survival, he repented for the past, understood the potency of uttering God's name with sincerity and trod back on the path of righteousness.

October 10, 1975

The nature of true devotion 6.10

As it is commonly found to-day, devotion is self-centred, superstition-ridden and often anti-social. People seek God's grace for tiding over crises or for getting their desires fulfilled - better health, money, job promotion, passing examination and the like. If the Lord does not respond. He is rejected. In short, religion is reduced to a business proposition. Motivated Bhakti is not to be condemned as downright bad. To the extent that God is given a place in one's thoughts, it is commendable. But there are better types of Devotion. In its purest form, it is lofty and motiveless, finding expression in impeccable character, self-effacing love, dedication and service, as illustrated by Hanuman, Prahlada and Sukha. The Bhagavatham speaks of the glory of pure Bhakti.

Not only the ordinary people, who are firmly rooted in the worldly affairs, but those who have withdrawn into spiritual

realms are also attracted towards Lord Hari. Sukha was one of those who delighted in experiencing the Infinite Self (Atma). Absolutely free from bonds, he had no need to worship anybody. Yet, he was drawn towards the Lord. Prahlada's attitude was also the same. Theirs was a motiveless devotion and they loved God for His own sake, not for milking any benefit from Him.

Swami Ranganadananda, in a discourse said ethics always sought what was beneficial (Sreyas), as opposed to what was pleasant, to an individual. Though ethics was very essential, religion meant much more than morality. "You may lead an ethical life. You may discharge the entire gamut of duties and obligations cast on you. Yet, at the end of it, if you do not develop love of God, then the Dharma is absolutely infructuous, because you have not unfolded the deepest part of your personality". If one had a little capacity to love, the Bhagavatham would help to culture it, make it pure and infinite in dimension. Out of pure love for God comes Vairagya, naturally and spontaneously.

January 4, 1977

Character alone distinguishes a person 6.11

The acts of a human being are subject to severe limitations. He may plan a scheme with diligence. and care but while on stream, it may unexpectedly collapse. When it turns out to be a success, he will take the entire credit upon himself and boast of his skill and technical perfection without caring

to acknowledge the grace of God. If by chance the scheme fails, he will attribute it to the lack of Divine sanction. A devotee should never rely on his personal endeavour but submit himself to the dictates of the Almighty and seek His blessings for any venture, as the decision of the unseen mysterious Power is final, unquestionable and unalterable. Episodes in scriptures din this theme into us and highlight the fact that man's ability is puerile and ineffective before the strength of the Supreme Being. Sri Rama's exile proves this by His coronation being called off at the last moment. Likewise, events went contrary to all expectations for the unscrupulous elements in God's incarnation as Sri Krishna. Kamsa who was deeply attached to his cousin Devaki, was even reluctant to part with her company after her marriage but he wanted to kill her on the spot when informed that her son-to-be-born would cause his death.

Sri Embar Vijayaraghavachariar in his discourse in said through the characters of Kamsa, Sisupala and Jarasanda on the one hand and Vasudeva etc. on the other, God compares the conduct of the wicked and the virtuous and Dharma and Adharma. As Sri Krishna, God not only demonstrated His Supremacy (Paratwa) but also His easy accessibility (Soulabhya). He has also shown that character alone distinguished a person and other considerations like his birth in a higher caste were irrelevant. Sages who wanted to realise God were struck by the manner in which Yasoda, unable to bear the mischievous pranks of the Divine child, attempted to tie Him to a stone mortar but miserably failed till He himself volunteered to be bound. God is ready to reveal to devotees who plead their helplessness and seek His guidance.

December 17, 1977

Devotion leads to God realisation 6.12

All God's creations - beasts, birds, insects, human beings and plants perform many identical functions. They experience hunger they breathe, they have thirst and they grow. But man stands superior by virtue of the special privilege conferred on him by the Almighty - the power to grasp, judge, discriminate and act judiciously. Using his intellect, he can overcome hurdles. But this birth has come to him because of his noble deeds in the past and unless he makes the best use of this rare opportunity, he is likely to be deprived of this special favour. Even as a person who comes to possess wealth by his hard work will take steps to multiply it, every God-fearing man should aim at obtaining total liberation by adopting the procedures laid in the religious texts. But his mind can function as his friend or foe. The enemy within will entangle him in worldly pleasures and ruin him. But if he is careful, he can win over the deadly influences like lust, anger and malice and tread the path of virtue and righteousness.

Sri Kaviseri Subramania Sastrigal in his discourse said that methods like conduct of Homam, Yoga and Japa were only means but not an end in themselves. Like agriculture where the operations were to be repeated after every harvest, these chants are to be constantly recited. There would also be plenty of obstacles. The best way to enjoy Divine Bliss was to develop Devotion (Bhakti) which could be perfected by intense practice, driving away the impurities in the mind and enshrining God's form therein. Once his mind becomes conditioned, he can brave all hazards in life. A wealthy landholder who was mad after money, suddenly turned a pauper but within a short period he was able to know the misery attached to opulence and turned a recluse totally oblivious to joy or

grief. Contentment would also enable one to remain impervious to tests. Devotion helped a sincere soul to realise the Supreme Being.

December 20, 1977

God's concern for devotees 6.13

Devotion has many facets and devotees display different attitudes. Not all may desire to secure total liberation (Moksha) although that should be the aim. Some may cling to God only when danger stares at them. Even atheists are bound to feel perturbed when some calamity strikes them. God will welcome to His fold even such confirmed non-believers if they seek His help. In dire need of a medicine for his dying mother at midnight, in a downpour, a villager approached a medical shop owner, an agnost, who after a good deal of persuasion dispensed it. After the customer left, he was bewildered to notice that in the semi-darkness, he had included, a poisonous drug in the mixture. Shuddering at the consequences (enquiry, charges, punishment etc.). the pharmacist "threw" a challenge that if God saves him, he will become His servant. A little later, the villager returned to his shop to report the breakage of the bottle and spilling of the medicine due to his slip very near his doorstep. There are others who are extremely devoted but harbour doubts about the powers of the different forms of the Supreme Being. To them, God provides necessary enlightenment. Yet others pray to Him for obtaining material benefits, in the nature of quid pro quo. The best and fourth type of Bhaktas are "Gnanis" (the illumined) who do not expect any favour but wish well of God (like Periyazhwar).

In his discourse Sri S. Jayarama Sarma said God is certain to embrace those who submit themselves to Him without any reservation, though they may not be aware of the manner in which the protection is extended. God's concern for His devotees has been compared, in Srivachanabushanam to that of an aged father, who in spite of the deep affection shown towards him by his well-placed sons, on a festival day, remembers his prodigal child which ran away from home years ago. The episodes of Gajendra, Uddhava, Dhruva, Prahlada and others serve to remind us about the intensity of dedication and God's ready response. God descends from His celestial abode, at the same time making man ascend. But for man, the "call of the stomach" eclipses that of the "inner voice". To enable him to retain His form. God presents Himself in consecrated idols.

January 9, 1978

Distress makes man turn to Almighty 6.14

Invariably, any one of these factors - scholarship, intellectual superiority, wealth, power, fame or valour - makes a person forget God, the Giver. Imagine the rare instance of a person combining in himself all these - he will have no time to think of the Almighty. But he will certainly look to God the moment he is forced to face problems or is pushed into the ocean of sorrow. It is no secret nor is it strange that a person seeks refuge in Him only when he experiences grief. There is nothing surprising therefore, in a man pleading with God not to make him suffer.

But an outstanding character in our scriptures - Kunti, the mother of the illustrious Pandavas, requested Lord Krishna

to keep her ever immersed in distress, as that alone would compel her to turn to Him, and pray for His help. She was aware that God would never allow His sincere devotees to endure agony for ever.

The Bhagavatham, which spells out several philosophic doctrines for man's emancipation, refers to the supplication of Kunti to project the relationship between God and His creations, However, a thin veil of ignorance-cum-illusion separates the two, which can be torn asunder by devotion, detachment and performance of prescribed duties.

The Bhagavatham was made available to posterity by the folly as well as the wisdom of a mighty ruler. He committed a grievous crime against a sage in trance but on realising his mistake, renounced everything and rushed to get this text expounded. Almost the very first piece of advice tendered by this book to posterity is never to test the spiritual powers of God-men or insult servants of God or be discourteous to them. Any such attempt is sure to recoil and ruin the wrongdoer.

In a discourse, Sri K. Gopala Dikshitar referred to the incident in recent times when the ruler of Thanjavur who desired to test the attitude of Sridhara Ayya, a devotee of Lord Siva, towards Lord Vishnu as some sycophants had carried tales to the former that he was anti-Vishnu. The king had hidden a small idol of Lord Krishna with him in his palanquin and sought to test the saint's ability to identify it. Sridhara Ayya just threw before him, a piece of paper containing eight verses in praise of Lord Krishna. From then on, the King's dynasty started crumbling.

April 6, 1983

Sure way to get rid of cycle of rebirths 6.15

The span of human life, though theoretically fixed centuries ago, is reckoned as 100 years. Half of it is spent in vain in sleep, consigned to blind ignorance. Twenty years are spent in boyhood and adolescence. Ten years are "dedicated" to family life, when he suffers from attachment to worldly pleasures and infatuation. The declining years are miserable for him, because he would have turned infirm, his faculties would not function well and he would be of no use to anyone.

How can a man, whose senses have not been conquered, hope to liberate himself, bonded with powerful chords of affection? One who is wise should hence practise devotional service, as enunciated in the Bhagavatham, even from his childhood. Human life is the rarest of all, but is transient, as, at any moment, it might ebb away. Hence such a rare opportunity should be utilised to go through spiritual exercises and secure the moral power to resist temptation and meditate on God and get rid of rebirths.

In elaborating the message of extraordinary significance given by Prahlada, the boy-devotee, who surrendered himself totally at the feet of God and showed the least concern for the threats of torture held out by his father, Swami B.P. Yati Maharaj pointed out that for an ordinary man, attached to worldly enjoyments, who feels pleasures of the palate and carnal appetite as the be-all and end-all of human life, cannot discard his desires suddenly. God cannot be won over by wealth, birth in high society, personal charm, austerities, scholarship, splendour, authority, wisdom and other acquisitions.

But God is pleased with a sincere appeal to save him and with the display of one's helplessness to steer through this ocean of life without His assistance. One should remember

the nature of devotion of the elephant Gajendra for whose sake the Almighty rushed from His abode.

A person with rare distinction and meritorious attainments, but devoid of unflinching devotion, may be considered inferior to a low-born, like a dog-eater who has dedicated his mind, body, soul, wealth and all that he possesses, to the service of God. While He may not accept worship from men without devotion or agnostics. He is ever merciful to the faithful. Prahlada proved that God would be ready to extend His succour to anyone taking shelter under Him. For the child's sake, the Lord took a special incarnation of "Nrisimha".

May 27, 1986

Soul searching is the way to God 6.16

God confers benefits and boons - spiritual as well as secular - on all His devotees, irrespective of their castes, classes or positions (held in life). All that He is concerned is about the sincerity and intensity of their devotion. The distinctions of religious groupings and castes are applicable only to the body whereas the soul inside each God's creation is the same. Of course, differences among people exist in accordance with the nature of duties they perform, customs and the laws governing personal conduct. God knows of only one group - "Devotees".

God has declared that He resides in the hearts of those who sing His praise. If one searches for His presence within oneself, God is bound to reveal Himself. Applying the collyrium of sincere devotion to the eyes, it will be possible to enjoy

His vision, says an axiom. Many do not know this and run about seeking Him even as a muskdeer, not aware of the existence of the valuable scent in its umbilicus, searches all over the forest. Just as iron is attracted by a magnet, a devotee's mind is unaccountably drawn towards the Lord. God's impartiality is demonstrated by the compassion He extended to one born in a demon race but who took refuge in Him while He punished His brother who antogonised Him (Vibishana and Ravana). He gets pleased with those who obey His directives.

Saint Tulsidas, who went to a pilgrim centre, did not find God there but on return to his home was stunned to see him seated on the doorsteps. A devotee who reached Srirangam after traveling a long distance, was asked by God (there were days when He used to convey His decisions through priests) not to come inside the temple, within a trice, He presented Himself by the side of the devotee.

Sri K.V. Santhanagopalachariar, in a discourse, explained how child Prahlada, who had the privilege of developing deep devotion even when he was in his mother's womb and who defied his father for claiming himself to be superior to God, had said that hearing the stories of Lord Vishnu, chanting His names, remembering His deeds, waiting upon Him, offering worship, saluting Him, dedicating one's actions at His feet, cultivating friendship and placing ones body and belongings before Him, were the nine features of highest learning. Those who were engaged in worldly activities as their unsubdued senses continued to enjoy pleasures, would not get attached to Lord Krishna. The tortures suffered by Prahlada at the hands of attendants deputed by his father have been mentioned in the Bhagavatam and detailed in the Hari Bhakti Subodhayam.

January 30, 1993

Attachment, root cause of ignorance 6.17

Since human beings alone are endowed with the faculty of thinking, compared with animals which also eat and sleep but do not possess or acquire knowledge, this unique gift should be used to the best of advantage in helping laymen rise to a higher spiritual level. There is a spark of divinity dormant in everyone which just needs to be ignited. Man is like a raw stone which in the hands of a sculptor turns into a beautiful idol. For an ordinary person to take to religious pursuits, the guidance of a spiritual teacher in necessary.

What prevents man from treading the path of progress is his ego, making him presume that he can do anything by his own freewill and that he has the capacity to achieve what he wants, forgetting the existence of an unseen superior force. A story is told of a person who at midnight woke up to have a cup of water to quench his thirst. Not finding any vessel stored with water, he went to draw it from the well but found the shadow of the moon and believed that it had fallen into it. He tried to retrieve the moon for 3 to 4 hours with rope and anchor and pulled some dead weight underneath. Just then he looked up and noticed the moon and jumped with joy that out of his efforts, he was able to bring the moon up. In a similar manner, invariably man claims "I have done this", "This is mine" and 'Because of me this has taken shape'. All these vain boasts are due to his ignorance and Lord Krishna in His Bhagavad Gita has given the prescription as how to get rid of this ego, how to gain superior knowledge and get away from darkness.

Sri Chinna Sriman Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami, in a discourse, said, the rootcause of his ignorance is his attachment, mistaking the body and soul to be identical. To give up attachment would not mean that he has to run away

from his family and household activities. Many may express the view that they are disgusted with life and would feel happy to go to heaven but should, by chance, God arrive here to take them, they will vanish. The explanation contained in the Bhagavatham in the Jadabharatha episode where he tells King Rahuguna about body and soul needs mention here. It is a dissertation on the body-soul relationship, the body being subject to decay. Man will continue to revolve in the whirligig of worldly existence so long as he is not able to realise the true nature of the "Self", by discarding attachment, conquering the internal enemies and by resorting to the worship of the Lord.

March 27, 1993

Spiritual guide frees one from despair 6.18

Man's desires are countless and limitless. If analysed properly, all of them may be classified under three heads, a feeling that he should excel all others, at all times and places, that he should possess extraordinary knowledge and thirdly, he should be ever happy and cheerful. Take any of the desires and it will be found that they will belong to one of these categories. History reveals the anxiety and agony of every human being towards the realisation of these basic desires. But has anyone accomplished all of them? Only sages and saints have achieved this distinction while ordinary persons have miserably failed.

A study of our age-long ascetic traditions points out that their distinction was due to their tutelage under a spiritual mentor. Looking into the nature, referring to the pages of history, reflecting upon them and getting satisfied with the

fund of knowledge he acquires are the characteristics of man. At the same time, he regrets he has not learnt enough.

This shadow of discontent has been haunting man for so many ages. The spiritual guide frees him from this despair, enables him to enjoy the beatific vision of the shadowless light, grants him enlightenment and lights the path of his inward progress. This spiritual leader can take him on the difficult path to attain man's goal, which otherwise is impossible for him to reach, through the development of his intellect and acquisition of worldly experience.

Without this teacher's help he cannot get his basic desires fulfilled. Even securing such an outstanding luminary to be one's Guru should itself be considered as a privilege and the result of the virtuous acts in one's previous births.

There are numerous cultural and religious traditions but all of them acknowledge the need of a guide and the need to get initiation from him. The recitation of any portion of the Vedas begins with salutations to the preceptors. Swami Dattatreya propagated the 'Guru' tradition and Vyasa spread it in his Puranas.

In their heavenly abode, Parvathi requested Lord Siva to tell her about the distinction of such religious leader. Their discussion has come to be called Guru Gita. A person who aspires to be guided properly cannot select a mentor by himself, said Swami Ganapathi Satchidananda in a lecture.

They may be simple and unobtrusive but the spiritual guides will reveal themselves if there is an urge in a person to get released form shackless and a desire to experience peace. In their presence, there will be a transformation in one's attitudes. To strive to receive the assistance from such qualified leaders is one's duty.

June 7, 1993

Mind must be trained to think of God 6.19

Circumstances invariably exert their influence on individuals either making them pious or spoiling their lives. Many fall victims of indoctrination and similar external forces and behave contrary to established norms. Holy texts recount how some had cultivated hatred towards others without any reason. To enable people to strictly adhere to the Law of Righteousness, saints and sages have prescribed various steps to keep their minds pure, resisting the impact of evil forces because, when disturbed, the mind vacillates. It will take a long time to subdue or keep it in rest. Th best way is to train the mind is to think of God, when it will get quietened. Then the mind, which is already calm, will become more stable.

The Bhagavatham spells out nine methods by which the purity of the mind can be ensured and devotion can occupy it. To illustrate how a mighty member of the demon race turned a terror, the text refers to the anger that Hiranyakasipu harboured against God for having punished his brother. His son became, on the other hand, an ardent devotee of the Lord because he had the unique opportunity to listen to the merciful deeds of God and His concern for those who take refuge in Him, even as a child, developing within his mother's womb. The boy's mind which was pure because of holy association could not be perverted by the persuasion of undesirable elements.

The nine features of devotion outlined by the boy (Prahlada) which indeed could form the highest education were: To hear the praise of God, to remember His deeds, to sing about Him and chant His names, to involve oneself in His service, to worship Him, eulogise His traits, to dedicate all actions at His feet, to try and understand that He can be one's comrade, and to offer total surrender to Him and to His attendants.

By virtue of the spiritual wisdom he had gained, the child devotee was immune to threats against his life by his father, said Sri N. Lakshminarasimhan in a discourse. He continued to pin his faith on the Lord and so could remain unaffected by all acts of persecution perpetrated against him. The Lord saved him by slaying his father. Nothing would be impossible if one depends totally on God. Lack of this faith results in harbouring a feeling that we had been let down. Since tranquility of mind is needed, sacred books have indicated how this could be achieved.

October 8, 1993

Constant practice needed for penance 6.20

What prompts a person to commit forbidden acts (which results in sins)? What is penance about which mention has been made in all the holy books? Will it mean necessarily going through severe austerities? These questions have been explained in the same texts. Passion and anger are cited as the foes within one, which are responsible to make one indulge in misdeeds. They are likened to the nursery seedlings for a crop to be broadcast later. Not knowing the consequences, people may initially go about doing acts of indiscrimination, goaded by the other internal enemies. When they get punished they regret what they had done. For this, contentment should be developed. Among brothers, one may be bright and prosperous while the other may be less intelligent. The latter should not feel jealous of the former but pray to God to make him equally successful. He will obtain what he deserves.

Penance is essentially the control of mind, which again is a task that is almost impossible to achieve. But constant

practice may fetch results. It is also necessary to remain detached and abjure desires, accepting what the Almighty has provided. The sacred texts point out how people who start their lives get excessively involved in worldly pursuits. They may not be then aware of the unseen hand of God directing their activities. There is no bar to enjoyments but they should not be to the extent of forgetting God. The texts refer to the manner in which a family should stand united and how parents should bring up their children.

The Mahabaratham gives an example of a united family which faced a serious threat. One of them should sacrifice his or her life to be devoured by a demon. The father was ready to go but the wife pleaded that he should survive to tend the children. The young girl volunteered saying that her loss could be compensated by another child. The young boy brandishing a baton submitted that he would finish the demon, at which, even in the midst of grief, others made themselves happy. The moral is that even if differences crop amidst members of a family, they should be ironed out. A family is compared to a university. Also, those who are in a position to relieve the distress of others by virtue of their strength, should not fail to share the grief on such occasions. In this case, Kunti deputed Bhima as a substitute.

Sri. N. Rangarajachariar, in his Bhagavatam discourse, mentioned the manner in which a couple remained joyous and how the woman realised her position when the husband left her. God manifested Himself as her son and cleared her philosophic doubts. As Kapila, God explained how mind alone can be held responsible for the bondage and emancipation of a person. "With a mind equipped with true knowledge, dispassion and devotion, direct all your thoughts towards God", Kapila told her.

March 24, 1994

Nature has many lessons for man 6.21

While all lower creatures are to some extent capable of looking after their own welfare, man, who is endowed with intelligence and the discriminative power, can surely be his own teacher. By observation and inference, he can understand what will contribute to his ultimate good. He can gain superior knowledge from every creation of God's. The spiritual master will teach him that God alone is the cause of all causes, but he can learn from other teachers various aspects of spiritual doctrines and practices. 'Nature' provides him lessons on various aspects governing his conduct. A wise man can visualise the presence of God in every creation.

The Bhagavatham has a chapter on the discussion between a king and a young spiritual personality, wandering monk. The king asked him how he remained always happy, unaffected by worldly cravings. To this, the holyman gave an exposition on the behaviour of birds, beasts and insects which, if adopted by a man, will bring him peace and help him to get over the worldly travails. He listed out 24 such "teachers" and their ways and characteristics, a gist of which was given by Sri Agnihotram Ramanuja Thathachariar in a discourse. The human body, which is abtained after countless births as animals and birds, is a rare blessing. A wise man should hence strive, as long as the body lasts, for liberation from the transmigratory cycle.

Some people arrived at a house with marriage proposals for a girl living there. As no elder was present, the girl herself received them. To prepare them food, she went inside to husk paddy but the two pairs of bangles on her arms made sound and she felt that this would betray their poverty. One by one she removed them, ultimately retaining only one on each arm. There was then no sound.

The moral was, the young saint said, that there would be quarrel if too many persons stayed together and no one would think of God. Living alone and aloof was ideal for meditation. Another sermon learnt was from a courtesan who, having waited for clients, was disappointed that none came. She then developed revulsion at her way of life and recited a song on renunciation thanking God for having removed her ignorance. The essence of her poignant song was that desire was the source of sorrows. From even mountains and trees, an aspirant should learn to strive unselfishly for the good of others, the saint explained.

June 14, 1994

Contentment, mark of enlightened 6.22

It is a common trait in human beings to compare themselves with others and find out some cause for dissatisfaction with what they are endowed with. By such a process, there will always be the tendency to think that others are better-placed than themselves. It will be a great virtue if a person learns to count his blessings and shows his gratitude to the Almighty and learn to remain satisfied and contented with whatever comes his away. This quality is rare and is the mark of an enlightened person, who will feel that whatever he enjoys should be offered back to Him. He will use his time in gaining further spiritual wisdom by studying scriptures listening to the exposition of Divine works and moving in the company of god-minded persons only.

An analytical study of the Bhagavatam will remind us that most of us do not realise the value of human birth.

We seem to take if for granted and do not know what our previous births were and how difficult it was to attain the same. Only mankind can understand the travails of the world and adopt steps to transcend them by taking refuge in God. With this privilege conferred on us, we can proceed on the right direction without frittering away the precious gift by getting engrossed in matters of day-to-day existence. Joy and sorrow alternate and we should accept them. The mystic poet Andal prays to God that He should bless humanity to entertain the idea that every action is service to Him.

The - Bhagavatham will give us moral strength as it contains details of His incarnations when He had guided mankind to get over problems. In the present era, the easy method to reach Him is the recitation of His names for which no rigid discipline is necessary. In the sublimity and comprehensiveness of the pattern of devotion it inculcates, in the dignity and terseness of its diction, in its lyrical excellence and the wealth of imagery of its poetry, this sacred text is held as one of the greatest productions of the spiritual genius of India. The main thesis of this holy book is to enable readers to realise the greatness of the Lord as He incarnated as Krishna and the necessity of cultivating devotion to Him, said Sri M.R.Nagasubramaniam in his discourse.

God is always ready to respond to our prayers and the episodes indicate that He is forever with us. As people approach Him, He comes to them. It is in the mould of faith that He shapes Himself in forms understandable and stimulating to the human mind.

June 15, 1994

Atonement purifies man of misdeeds 6.23

Expression of sincere repentance will be the most powerful weapon, wielding which a person, can get exonerated from the consequences of misdeeds, even of a grave nature. No one in this life could have remained without committing an act considered sinful but admitting it with deep regret and taking appropriate measures of atonement will result in mitigating the sufferings. Punishment can be averted by an honest person who seeks excuse from the authority that dispenses justice. However, Law should not be taken into one's hands.

Two brothers entered an orchard and one of them, finding a mango tree in full bloom, plucked a fruit and tasted it. The other pointed out to him that he had committed an act of indiscretion by enjoying it without taking the permission of the owner or the sentry of the grove. The man who had eaten the fruit straight went to the ruler, told him of the wrong and wanted that his hand may be severed as a punishment. On the king refusing to do so as he felt that the punishment was too harsh, the man, of his own accord, cut his arm. However, the hand was restored.

The mighty emperor Parikshit, the only surviving member of the Pandavas, was equally zealous in upholding righteousness. Mistaking the silence of a sage who was was in deep meditation as an affront, the king threw around his neck (as a garland) the skin of a dead snake. The sage's son, unaware of the happenings, cursed the man who had insulted his father, to die on the seventh succeeding day, of snake bite. Later, coming to know of the entire sequences, the sage tendered his apology to Parikshit, who on his part realised the mistake he had done and was determined to undergo the punishment. To him, during the seven days, Bhagavatham was recited.

Sri Vishwesha Thirtha Swami in a discourse said, while administering his country, Parikshit learnt about the changes

in the spiritual values over the four eras. In the first, there were austerities, purity, compassion and truthfulness. Three of them were destroyed by the impact of pride and attachment. In the present (Kali era) unrighteousness prevailed strengthened by falsehood. However there will be honesty among some. The influence of bad elements will be witnessed. In this age, it can be seen that "Kali" will take shelter in places where gambling, drinks (liquor), passion and cruelty are resorted to by people. But even now, men can remain virtuous and pious by avoiding these vices. Those seeking blessedness and leaders of people should not resort to them. Men should guard themselves against these bad tendencies because even as devils, driven out by the front door, may show themselves through windows, the former will try to dominate when one is not careful".

July 18, 1994

Acts, the touchstone of devotion to God 6.24

The highest duty of a person who aspires to reach God consists in carrying out acts which will generate deep devotion to the Supreme Being. Rituals, however well-performed, will be deemed a waste if they fail to make him admire the sportive manifestations of God. Hence men should hear about, praise, worship and meditate on the forms of the Almighty. Contemplation on His benevolent deeds will serve to remove bondages.

Man has ears only to listen to the glorious pastimes of the Lord. Otherwise, when they are allowed to hear subjects of worldly nature, they can very well be called mere (empty) hollows where snakes can enter easily. The tongue should be used only to sing His praise or chant His names; if not

it will be like that of a frog's croaking. Man's head should bow to the Lord; if this is not done, even the crown that he wears will be a burden. The ornament and jewellery he wears on his body would be adorning only a corpse if the person concerned does not divert his attention to serve God. The heart and soul of a man have been gifted only to love Him.

Swami Thejomayananda (Spiritual Head of Chinmaya Mission) in his Bhagavatham lecture referred to man's mechanical life, comparing him to a sleepwalker. He is afflicted with grief, seized with fear and gripped by delusion. He forgets that only the fruits of his righteous duties will accompany him on his death. He fails to train his faculties properly by turning them towards God and so, at the time of his death, is unable to remember the privileges conferred by God him. On the other hand, he should think of God even amid his work and dedicate the fruits of all his actions at the feet of God.

The mighty Purana (Bhagavatham) explains at the outset sage Suka's exposition to King Parikshiat who desires to know what would lead to the spiritual good of one who is threatened with imminent death like himself. The text elaborates the conversation between Brahma and Narada wherever cosmic theories and theological doctrines are covered. Vishnu's instructions to Brahma are contained in the four verses considered the soul of the Bhagavatham. They say that before creation, He alone existed. The seeker of truth has to grasp that "substance" that persists always through all its transformations. Brahma taught the hymn to Narada who in turn expounded it to Vyasa from whom Suka learnt and then narrated it to Parikshit.

September 3, 1994

Incarnation and re-birth 6.25

Hindu religion firmly believes in re-births, based on the individual soul's conduct during his sojourn in the world. If a person carries out his pious obligations sincerely, he will go to heaven. If he had been wicked, he will be pushed to hell. Where he had combined in himself both good and bad, he will reappear in this universe in some form. This is no doubt true in the case of any God's creation, but the scriptural authority describes God Himself as having incarnated amidst humanity. Does that mean that He too had indulged in evil acts as to be sent here? By no stretch of imagination can anyone equate Him with mortals.

Human existence can be compared to the lives of the fauna in the ocean. They survive and perish. But God can be likened to a ship which can safely take men across the sea. He is the saviour of mankind. All holy texts clearly indicate that God can do no wrong though some of His pastimes may apparently seem to be a bundle of contradictions. Men ought to believe in His supreme power.

Suspicion being a deep-seated malady, if men continue to entertain doubts about certain acts of His, which, from their view, are puzzling, they cannot be convinced. Human nature is such that once men form an opinion of a person, even if he does unpardonable mistakes, they will declare him as innocent. Likewise, if they once view him as bad, even his noble deeds will be termed as hypocrisy.

In this connection, reference can be made to the Bhagavad Gita where Arjuna, short of saying that He was indulging in a bluff, ridicules God-incarnate Krishna Who said He existed long before the planets and stars appeared. It was then that the Lord declared that while He as the Creator, knows His

past and future, man can never recall what form he had assumed in his previous life, nor can say what type of birth he will take in his next life.

The classic example to explain the difference between man and God is that of a convict in a prison and the Superintendent of Jails. The former has to stay till his term of sentence expires whereas the officer makes a brief visit to inspect the conditions inside and hence no one will say he too is a prisoner just because he spends a few hours there.

In his discourse, Sri N. Babu Dikshitar referred to the arguments of a few sceptics that as Krishna, the Lord had sported with women. But nowhere was there any attempt on His part to indulge in unethical acts nor was there any compulsion or use of force nor any instance of display of carnality. Both as Rama and as Krishna, the Lord's main duty was to re-establish moral order. As Krishna, He gave the message that mortals can get over their sufferings by chanting the Divine names.

January 6, 1995

God's name mitigates sorrows 6.26

If God be really merciful and impartial as claimed in the entire gamut of religious literature, why should some people be prosperous and some distressed? Why among His creations should such patent differences be allowed to exist? This doubt is being entertained by many.

It is not surprising to see that in the same family, one child is brilliant while another is a dunce. When a father

divides his assets among his two sons, one uses them to build a lucrative business and become a success whereas the other squanders the entire money and turns a pauper. Why this variation in attitudes? Certainly, God can take no responsibility for this mode of behaviour of men. Scriptures explain this phenomenon as arising out of the past deeds of individuals. If one has obeyed the Divine commands, naturally God will feel pleased with him. Violation of the same will incur His displeasure. Protection or punishment are thus based on one's previous acts. Those who have done good are sure to enjoy the fruits while culprits will not escape the dire consequences. If a person enters a tank full of water, he ought to know swimming. Otherwise, he will get drowned. Should the reservoir be blamed for the latter's end? Likewise, God has no role in what a person does or how he acts because it is his own making. Scriptural literature categorises this as fate while in common parlance, it is called 'karma' (action and reaction).

Sages have prescribed deeds of atonement for those who undergo suffering, to get their sorrows mitigated. These acts of atonement should be carried out as per the procedure. Once a person tenders his apology that he will not repeat his bad acts, he should remain ever vigilant. These propitiatory measures should make him think of God within him. He should continue to display deep devotion to Him.

Sri Krishna Premi in his discourse, explained how chanting of Divine names enables a sincere devotee to get the impurities in his mind flushed out. Those who can adopt rigid austerities can certainly perform them to keep their minds freed from dirt but helpless lay men have this simple technique of reciting any of God's names, to invoke Divine blessings. All that he has to do is to express his inability or incapacity to stall his mind from gallopping and that he totally depends on Divine mercy alone. No restriction of time or place or qualification is needed to utter His name. The Chyavana Sruthi, Skanda

Puranam, Adi Sankara, the Azhwars, Dhruva, Gajendra have all extolled the procedure of chanting His names to win God's grace. How Kshatrabandu and Ajamila were saved is mentioned in sacred texts. Such constant recitation will get ingrained in a devotee when he moves in the company of the pious.

January 9, 1995

Untamed mind leads to disaster 6.27

The mind of man can be compared to an invincible enemy grown extremely powerful because of his own negligence. It is a field that yields a bumper harvest of the ills of the transmigratory life. Having become turbulent because of man's indifference, the mind cannot be controlled and it will lead him to ruin or cause irreparable damage. Emphasis is laid on curbing the vagaries of the mind because it generates desires, infatuation and sufferings.

The mind, when attached to the sense objects, causes misery and when it is kept pure, liberation could be achieved. Many liken it to a burglar seated within a man, ready to blunt or rob his faculties.

One of the best examples of how the mind works is that of a humble worker who has put in a number of years of service in a big factory. One day he conceals a manufactured product and his act escapes the attention of the watchmen. He repeats it as he has not been caught. As days pass, he is emboldened to lift a number of objects, without the sentries being aware of his misdeed. The practice continues and he commits the theft on a largescale. Even after new guards are posted, he continues with his stealing habit.

The mind, when allowed to go astray because of man's indifference or negligence or connivance, turns insolent, refusing to obey when a crucial situation arises. The only way to subdue its arrogance is to use the "arrow of service" to God and to the spiritual guide (Guru). The grace of the Divine will be available through the mediation of the spiritual mentor. The master who leads an aspirant to God should be treated as God Himself, revered and his advice followed as he provides enlightenment. He should not be considered as an ordinary person. With his help, mind, the villain, can be quelled. The formula of seeking the guidance of the teacher and submitting oneself before God to curb the mind forms part of a dissertation given by (Jada) Bharata to a king, who initially thought that he was a madcap. Bharata's detailed account of the phenomenal nature of the world, the working of the mind and allied topics provide a proper perspective of life. An analysis of Bharata's teachings contained in the Bhagavatham was provided by Sri B. Sundar Kumar in a discourse.

God alone is unaffected by the concept of time, dimension and space, whereas the ordinary human being undergoes changes and even the world goes through alterations. Like the body which is subject to decay, the universe undergoes various processes of change and thus both can be stated to be impermanent. The ultimate Truth is called by the sages "Bhagavan" possessor of all Divine majesties.

June 2, 1995

Man's faculties must be used properly 6.28

In one of the most significant statements contained in an Epic, a character, known for his wicked traits says,

'I know the nuances of the Law of Righteousness but I am not able to uphold them. I am also aware of the acts which are prohibited by the Law but I feel helpless and not in a position to refrain from them". Man's mind is the mischief maker as it tempts and lures him to yield to worldly activities. But there are remedies to enable him to walk on the path of virtue and one among them is to offer worship to God (puja) and seek His guidance to gain control over the mind.

It is the bounden duty of a human being to repay his debt of gratitude to the Almighty who has bestowed on him several gifts. God does not expect any return excepting his devotion, which should be sincere and steadfast. Hence, when worshipping God, man should seek only His grace. It is not necessary that a person should perform puja in a pompous and extravagant style. The Lord in the Bhagavad Gita indicates that a worshipper can place at His feet a flower or a leaf or whatever he can, but qualifies this by adding that it should be offered with absolute devotion. He looks into the attitude behind the submission. A person should know God's attributes, power and His grace, which He will extend in response to prayer.

Sri Vidyadheesha Thirtha (of Palimar Math, Udupi) in a discourse said, man should put his faculties to proper use. The intellect that he possesses should help him in discriminating between good and bad. He should think positively and act only in accordance with Divine rules. The Senses should be diverted only to enjoy God's forms and sing His praise but unfortunately they are allowed to stray forgetting that real happiness is in service to the Lord and ultimately reaching the goal of salvation.

In the Bhagavatham, in reply to the enquiry of the ruler who was cursed to die with a week, sage Suka said: "There are many things worth hearing and attending to, but men

are blind to the truth of the Self. Those who desire the fearless state (moksha) should recite and dwell on the pastimes of the Lord and retain His vision in the mind. That alone is the supreme reward of human birth and it has to be earned through the display of devotional love and steadfastness to sacred duties. What is more important is to show this devotion passionately, continuously and constantly".

Devotion is necessary at all sages and it can be secured through step by step practice. The human body can be used wisely as an instrument for gaining Liberation.

June 24, 1995

Abide by scriptural injunctions 6.29

Just as any violation of the statutory provisions of the penal laws attracts punishment, in the spiritual realm also, transgression of the Divine commandments has its effect. Sages and saints have explained the rules of the Divine Law so that they can be upheld by those who desire to go through their life's journey in a peaceful manner. In modern days, even the basic requirements of the codes governing pious conduct are not understood by many. Some are aware of the contents of the scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita but are averse to, or not interested in carrying out the duties ordained therein. Where is the need for these norms and what is their relevance to the present day, some ask.

The attention of such persons who know the value of tradition but, yet doubt its validity should be drawn to God's statement in the Gita, "The fundamental injunction is to

lead a pure devotional life in obedience to scriptures. He who overrules the scriptural ordinances and follows the idiosyncrasies of his own mind, will neither be successful nor happy nor can he realise the ultimate goal. Hence scriptures (Sastras) are the criteria for determining what is duty and what is non-duty that is to be abjured".

The spiritual awareness found among some in the present period is because of their respect to saintly men who still live among us and who act as guides. What distinguishes these holy men is their strict adherence to the Divine directives and their detached outlook. Great and noble men stand as example for laymen.

To enable mankind to tread the path of righteousness, sages and saints have left literature enshrining the revelations of the Vedas. The study of the Bhagavatam, for instance, will promote knowledge, devotion and detachment. A man who aspires to lead a disciplined life should realise his relationship with God and the obstacles preventing him from reaching Him. As part of his devotional exercises, he should be at God's loving service for ever. Detachment can be developed by discarding the evil aspects in life and avoiding the pitfalls. The Brahma Stuti points out how the Lord in human form demonstrated His omnipresence when Brahma out of his ego committed the mistake of testing His powers. The Lord yielded to the prayer of a devotee and got Himself bound by a rope. This earned Him the name Damodara.

Sri R. Aravamudan in his discourse explained how the verses of the popular hymn Tiruppavai by Andal conveyed God's auspicious attributes and how He was ready to extend His compassion to those who sought refuge in Him. The episodes in the Bhagavatham are interspersed in this work, to impress on men the need to abide by His orders.

March 22, 1997

The Almighty is impartial 6.30

The direct utterances or revelations of God (the Vedas) at times give rise to doubts and different interpretations. This naturally evokes derision among non-believers about God's supremacy, as how the "deeply venerated" Almighty Himself can err. What is the purpose then in relying on these statements? There are more than 3000 references in the Vedas favouring the arguments of those inclined to denigrate God. In other fields also the Vedas appear to present contradictory views. But it must be understood clearly that wherever such ambiguous aphorisms are seen, sages and saints who had mastery over the Vedic revelations had given appropriate clarifications, leaving no scope for confusion. Scriptures categorically say that God is impartial and favours none. He is compassionate and merciful. How then can one account for the very same scriptural authority giving instances of God going to the rescue of the celestials and punishing the demoniac forces. Even today, some refer to the these episodes and brand God as having shown His preference for some.

The Bhagavatam was recited to enable an emperor secure peace within a brief time as he was cursed to die because of an act of indiscretion. Listening to God's glory mentioned in the various incarnations, the emperor desired to know why God had displayed antagonism towards a demon king and had taken a special incarnation as 'Narasimha' (man-lion form).

In his discourse, Sri Mukkur Lakshminarasimhachariar referred to the emperor's question, "Was God actuated by partiality? He had nothing to gain from the celestials nor entertain enmity against the demon race". In reply, Sage Suka said an identical question was put even earlier, during the days of the Mahabharata when Yudhishtira sought to

get elucidation from Narada about certain strange incidents like the "absorption" into Lord Krishna of His sworn enemy Sisupala and again those who had reviled against Him, merging into Him. Narada explained how one should concentrate one's mind on the Lord completely either through enmity or through total freedom from it (by continuous and steady devotion) and gave practical illustrations.

Lord Siva had praised the Divine form of Narasimha in His "Mantra Raja Pada Stotram", a hymn that had been accepted as unique and efficacious by the Acharyas of all schools. Its recitation by devotees daily will provide wealth (here and hereafter in God's kingdom in the form of eternal service), spiritual knowledge and physical power, and will remove fear, tension, hallucination and sins. The esoteric significance of the mantras studded in this simple but effective hymn of 12 verses was presented by Siva to Parvati and has been widely commented upon.

May 15, 1997

Universality of the Gita 7.1

The teachings embodied in the Bhagavad Gita possess eternal value and are universal in their applicability. This is the only philosophical work that enjoys the widest currency. It has been translated and annotated into several Indian and Western languages. Its message continues to be as fresh and inspiring today, as it was when the Lord delivered it to Arjuna. Though there are other equally elevating teachings, some of which have also the suffix Gita, why is that the Celestial Song, the message of true knowledge delivered to Arjuna by Sri Krishna, has come to occupy a supreme place? The answer is to be found in the setting in which this Divine message was given to the world.

The setting of the Gitopadesa is the battlefield of Kurukshetra, where the two contending armies, the armies of the Pandavas and of the Kauravas, are arrayed in battle formation and poised to go into action at the given signal. Arjuna is the central figure in this interesting drama. He is seated in his chariot and Lord Krishna Himself is the charioteer. Arjuna, who, a little while ago, more or less directed Sri Krishna to spur the horses forward and station his chariot in between the opposing armies, has humbled himself into the position of a pupil at the feet of the Divine Charioteer, whom he has raised to the pedestal of a Teacher. Arjuna surrenders himself unreservedly to the mercy of Krishna and implores him to guide him. The situation is so tense that Arjuna is not sure whether the next moment his head will be standing intact on his shoulders, or will be rolling in the dust soaked with the blood of the fighting men. In actual life, we see that a passing shower is enough to melt an audience listening to a discourse on Truth. People are more concerned with saving their clothes than hearing advice, however ennobling it may be. But here is a case where a man in the jaws of death is wanting to learn and the Lord

is willing to teach. It is this setting that has endowed the Bhagavad Gita with eternal value and supremacy over all other teachings.

There is also another aspect to the situation. Arjuna has proved himself fit to receive any advice or direction the Lord may choose to give. Hostilities are about to commence and there is no knowing how many and who all will lose their lives. Arjuna is no coward and does not want to run away from the battlefield, though he has expressed his unwillingness to fight. His only objection to fight is that the war will entail his killing those whom he regards as his elders and relations. He does not mind being killed by the opponents, without himself raising even his little finger to harm those arrayed in the opposite camp. In fact, he desires this to happen, so that the slaughter inherent in a war may be avoided. That means, Arjuna has overcome all desires and attachment to life. He has attained the state of mind which is fit to receive true knowledge. There can be no better touchstone to test the complete detachment of a person than the battlefield. Arjuna is desirous to learn the only thing that matters -- Jnana or Truth. Seeing that Arjuna has come out successful in the qualifying test and made himself fit to receive knowledge, the Lord teaches him. That is also how the message of the Gita has come to possess eternal and lasting value.

Incidentally, Arjuna has made out a good case for banning all wars. He says that any war is wrong and if one side is foolish enough to resort to arms, it is better to ward off aggression by refusing to retaliate, and thereby bringing about unilateral disarmament. In that case, the casualty will be low. The violence of war is different from the violence of punishment imposed by a Judge for a crime. A Judge is a disinterested person and punishment is intended to act as a deterrent, to check the tendency to commit crimes or

evil deeds. The disgrace attached to imprisonment and the hardship inside jails make people afraid to commit crimes.

But war stands on a different footing. It wipes out elders from society, leaving children and women without any guidance. Consequently there is disruption of family life, leading to deterioration of Dharma and the loss of chastity. When women lose their chastity, Varna Sankara is the consequence. Varna sankara results in suffering Naraka, eternal misery. In the general interest of Dharma, it is far better to submit bravely and without retaliating to extermination than to retaliate and suffer greater human loss. After expressing this view, Arjuna remains heart-broken.

But how does Krishna meet the the argument? His reply contains a touch of admonition. "Cast off your mental weakness and arise," says Krishna. "If you decide to refrain from fighting, it must not be from a sense of grief over the deaths that will result from it. Your weeping implies that you are affected by egoism and attachment, the sense of the 'I' and the 'mine. Fighting is the action that you should do as a Kshatriya. In your present state of mind, you have not attained the qualification to abjure all actions. Activity ceases only in the case of an unattached person. You are attached to your relatives, elders and teachers and bemoan their sure death in the battle. And so, inactivity is not yours now. You have no yet acquired the Siddhi which will justify that inactivity. To attain that Siddhi, you should do the karma ordained by your Svadharma, " says the Lord. Therefore, Krishna wants Arjuna to achieve personal perfection before he can qualify for this humanitarian attitude of absence from fighting.

The Lord's teachings embodied in the Gita contain the answer to the question often posed, namely, which should have preference, individual salvation or Lokakshema. The Gita makes it plain that unless one is perfect oneself, one

is not qualified to engage oneself in acts of public good, Lokakshema. A person who weeps or is angry, that is, a person who is himself subject to grief or anger cannot succeed in removing the like ills of others. The man who is subject to delusion is not qualified to rid the world of its delusions.

And if there is a person who has overcome grief and other infirmities that subvert the soul, then his very existence in this world will contribute to public weal. He need not go out to reform the world, he need not strive for Lokakshema; the world will learn to reform itself by his example and its consequent conduct will, of its own accord, lead to Lokakshema.

The only way to overcome grief and other infirmities is through Jnana. That is why the Lord proceeds to gradually instruct Arjuna in the truths of Atma Jnana, which ultimately dispels his delusions. The Gita begins with the grief of Arjuna. The Lord chided him for it at the commencement of His Gitopadesa, but towards the close tells him, "Do not grieve". The command to fight, shows that even at the cost of the death of many warriors on both sides, one should perform one's Svadharma as a Kshatriya. For, the practice of Svadharma, without attachment and with resignation, will alone make for Chittasuddhi so necessary for Jnana Praapti. Such a Jnani becomes perfect soul, who, by his very presence, brings about Lokasangraha in the truest sense of the term, and in the most effective manner. Individual elevation will enable one to lift others.

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi

The Gita: Eternal beacon for mankind 7.2

Money has always been a master, never a slave. With enormous riches at their command, those in authority are

able to influence even men known for their detachment. At the commencement of the Kurukshetra battle, Yudhishtirar went to his grandfather Bhishma, who was guiding the Kauravas and sought his blessings. A symbol of supreme sacrifice, Bhishma told him that having fallen into the clutches of Duryodhana and enjoyed the comforts provided by him, he had the moral obligation to fight on his side, but he had always felt, being righteous, that the Pandavas would definitely win, admitting that he too was no exception to the lure of office.

In his discourse Sri T. Ramakrishna Iyengar said when the war was about to start, Arjuna became nervous and refused to fight, arguing that he would not commit fratricide and genocide. Sri Krishna then spelt out the Divine Message, Bhagavad Gita, to serve as an eternal beacon for mankind. It explains the greatness of the path of devotion for God-realisation and the link between the human being and the Paramatma, pointing out that the acts of an individual are guided by the Unseen and that he has no independence. Once he expresses his utter inability to save himself and pleads his helplessness, God will protect him. If it is difficult to remember the philosophic contents of the Gita, the lecturer said, it is enough if one retained in his mind the picture of the Almighty, as charioteer, extending His advice to Arjuna.

June 11, 1970

Prime requisites of a devotee 7.3

Surrender to God and a keen desire to see Him face to face are the prime requisites of a devotee. But unless God Himself chooses to grant us the Divine insight, it is not possible to see Him. God's world is "Paravak" but it

has to find expression among men in different times, places and situations and hence this communication in terms of language (vaikhari) became diverse: different traditions arose but all of them stemmed from and led to the one and the same Ultimate, in whatever terminology one may refer to it, personal or impersonal. The diversity of traditions in a sacred text even within a single religion like Christianity and Hinduism resulted in the growth of scriptures and schools of interpretations. A seeker of Truth should dive deep into the lines of the basic work, ponder and meditate on the teachings therein.

In a lecture Fr. Ignatius Hirudayam said it was beside the point whether Lord Krishna and Arjuna and the discussions were historical; it was the dialogue of the Supreme Self to the individual soul (Jivatma). The second sloka of the prayer of Arjuna witnessing the awe-inspiring form (Viswarupa) of the Lord formed part of his (the lecturer's) own daily puja. When Yudhistirar went to heaven, he saw Duryodhana there, already enjoying a regal status, according to the belief called "Veera Swargam", while the battle of Kurukshetra was fought to establish Dharma against Adharma as Duryodhana was portrayed as the symbol of evil and unrighteousness. Such ideas, the speaker said, should be understood by taking the whole matter into consideration and the basic principles such as what was declared by the Lord in the Gita ("Urdhavam gacchanti,) -- those established in Satwa ascended high and those of reprehensible activity (Tamas) went down to the depths. Different schools of religion and philosophy posit each its own Tatwas or categories. The more one propounded, the greater perhaps was his view that his philosophy was more significant. But the real Tatwa is one -it should be sought by meditation, with the resolve (of Arjuna - "Drashtum icchami te rupam") - "I desire to see you face to face".

January 11, 1978

When one is pious, noble and humble 7.4

The thoughts, words and deeds of a man should be in perfect unison and consistent. If there is such a harmony of these three, he will be pious, noble and humble. A person who has particular plans, says something different from them and acts contrary to the plans and to what he has said, may be likened to a beast. Man should maintain his equanimity and not try to show himself off, or be pompous. Our scriptures and sacred texts are our treasures and contain ancient wisdom. Their study will enable us to acquire knowledge and keep our mind balanced.

Saints and mighty personages have expounded the doctrines contained in our religious literature while non-conformists and atheists have questioned their veracity. But the sayings therein remain lustrous. Hindu scriptures are comparable to an ocean -- Both when its water is evaporated by the sun's rays and given back to the people as potable water or when the waters of several rivers empty themselves into it, it maintains its level.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi, in a discourse here, said a mere study of the Sastras will not by itself lead a man to perfection. He must experience the presence of Divinity by knowing their contents. They should transform him into a virtuous human being. Acquiring knowledge of the Sastras without learning to be humble will be purposeless like music without melody or friendship without gratitude or knowledge without wisdom.

The Bhagavad Gita suggests three steps for a devotee -- listening, seeing and experiencing -- indicating that the scriptures should be digested. God's presence is witnessed and Divine bliss is experienced in the end. Then he will maintain

internal harmony and balance. In this connection. "Sath Sangam" -- association with men of integrity and piety who can help in the process of purifying the mind is recommended for all.

August 4, 1982

Man should work like a refinery 7.5

Lord Krishna's message in the Song Celestial is that even in the midst of work, a man can see the divine. The teaching is based on the "Philosophy of action" and is concerned about the "man at work". Humanism has been there for a long time, but the real test is to see whether we behave in a human way. Humanism seems to have been forgotten over the years. The Bhagavad Gita inspires us to tap the humanistic impulses. The "infinite" manifests itself in all human beings like the Sun whose reflection can be seen in ponds, lakes and pools. Man is the centre of infinite possibilities because his soul is pure, has no hatred and does not give room for violence. Religion is the manifestation of Divinity in man and there is spiritual background because it is in his very nature. What is needed is that he should learn the science of unfolding the tremendous at any time. As the Upanishad says, we should "march on."

In a lecture, Swami Ranganadananda referred to the process of crude oil being tapped, refined and then made the end product. Likewise, the human body should be converted into a refinery of experience. By removing the dirt, we should be refined, converting hatred into love. "We have to create a humanistic social order." There should be concern for others and we must ponder whether we have prayed at least once for others.

The Gita says that "work and workship" are the same. If someone is offensive in speech, we should not retaliate. Forget it for a day or two, your mind will become calm and you will never retaliate. We should enrich society by good work. The study of Gita helps develop character. We should think that everyone is our neighbour and do everything to help remove the sufferings of others. The greatest task is to destroy all anti-human feelings.

September 12, 1989

The Gita is Vedas in essence 7.6

The statements made in the extensive Divine, self-revealed, Vedas are categorical, eternal, irrefutable and have permanent validity. These utterances clearly indicate who the Supreme controller of the world and humanity is and how He can be perceived and realised. To study the vast lore and to determine the gradual steps of duties in life are difficult for men. Hence, a succinct, simple, scientific and definite conclusion regarding Vedic principles was needed. The Epics, Puranas and other sacred works were contributed by sages and saints through narratives incorporating the directives given by God for men to avert rebirths. If one follows them, one will get the reward. Disobedience will naturally attract punishment.

The Mahabharatam contains all the revelations, explained directly. In this monumental scriptural text, the Bhagavad Gita is enshrined, dispelling man's doubts and affirming the "Reality", paving the way for man to return to God. There are several commentaries on the Gita, one differing from

another and sometimes one found even opposed to the other. But the Gita was delivered by the Lord Himself and so is in strict conformity with the Vedic teachings. Being infallible, its contents cannot be given "twists" to suit erroneous beliefs and views. Doubts in interpreting certain sayings may arise but the clarifications have to be only in consonance with basic source -- the Vedas and Sastras.

Srimad Andavan Swami in a discourse on the Gita, said Ramanuja has written a brilliant commentary, drawing inspiration from Alavandar's crisp work. Ramanuja learnt the secrets embedded in the Lord's poem, 18 times which only shows how important it is and how God has enabled men to recover from drooping faith. If Alavandar (Yamuna) had laid a foot path to reach God's abode, Ramanuja had made it a royal road. Vedanta Desika has also rendered the Gita's message, explaining that Sri Krishna in this celestial song, has removed the confusion in Arjuna's mind. Scriptures point out that digesting the Gita, taking a dip in the holy Ganga, chanting the Gayatri mantra and reciting the name Govinda (the four-Gs) will prevent re-birth.

November 9, 1991

Three levels of austerity 7.7

The term penance or austerity which finds frequent reference in our holy books (as Tapas) should not be mistaken to be merely the act of standing and meditating on one leg in the region of the Himalayas or adopting the posture of stretching the body upwards, with the head on the floor. It is an intelligent activity in which a person withdraws the energy which he was hitherto spending in wrong channels but conserve the same, preserve and reserve, rediverting it in a beneficial manner. It does not mean torturing oneself.

Three levels are involved in observing the austerities.... physical, vocal and mental. Those intended to propitiate the Gods, preceptors, the truly wise and true devotees and those which include purity, simplicity and inoffensiveness appertain to physical 'Tapas'. Austerities not unpleasant to anyone, truthful and full of soft words and conduct relate to the speech while those which are conducive to the serenity of the mind, silence and purification of the heart are categorised as mental. The ethical conduct of man can be summed up to fall under the purifying agents -- sacrifice, austerity and charity.

Emphasising how people should respect those teachers who profess wealth of knowledge, (when conducting austerities), Prof. C. G. Vasudevan in a lecture said they should descend to the level of students allowing them to discover the morals from the stories narrated. The 'truly wise' as Lord Krishna points out in His 'Gita', may not teach in its strict sense but will be full of worldly knowledge and commonsense. A story is told of a bishop who became rich which made the king envious. He challenged the former to reply to his three queries or face execution. Seeing the bishop's grief, a shepherd volunteered to deputise him. To the first question, 'How long will it take for me to go round the world,' the answer was 'If you rise with the Sun, and go with it one full day.' "What is my value in the world", was the second to which the commoner said, "29 pieces of silver". Why 29? "Because Jesus was sold for 30 and you are worth about it." Thirdly, he was asked, "What is God thinking of now"?"How foolish are you, as you are listening to a shepherd before you!"

May 30, 1992

The wise are fearless 7.8

Life is a continuous experience and people should ever be optimistic. It is in their power to respond to any type of situation. There may be critical tests but they should be taken as opportunities and the challenges faced. Wisemen will not be concerned about happiness or grief nor about pleasure and pain. They will maintain the balance of mind. "Never grieve" is the advice tendered by the Lord Himself. Be cheerful and keep smiling, He adds.

The Lord's words flowed when His disciple, a hero, suddenly became dispirited and dejected. Seeing him crest-fallen, Sri Krishna (in Bhagavad Gita). wondered why this disgraceful delusion of his, giving room for cowardice. This despondency was due to his over-attachment to the kith and kin. "Give up this pusillanimity of heart and rise to the occasion" the Lord exhorted him (Arjuna). Still unable to discern right from wrong, he sought the remedy for his grief. The Lord's reply is applicable for mankind, at all times. "Despite your talking like the wise, you are really mourning for those who are not worth mourning, because the truly wise lament neither for the living nor for the dead" said the Lord. "They alone are wise who know the Self. We shall certainly continue to exist even after the death of the bodies. We are eternal in all the three periods of time(past,present and future)." The "Self" passes unchanged in the present body into the three stages (childhood, youth and age of decay), all distinct from one another. So too, the Self goes into another body without change. The Self is thus eternal."

Swami Bodhananda Saraswathi in a lecture said, men of pure intelligence (Pandita), according to Lord Krishna, will not deplore the loss by death of this temporary tabernacle of the soul. Sense-perception is either pleasant or painful; what is pleasant in one set of circumstances may be painful

in another. That person to whom both are alike, who neither exults nor feels dejected, who is a man of wisdom, who is not affected by anything by virtue of his vision of the eternal Self, will be able to attain immortality.

The physical body of flesh and blood is ephemeral but the Self (individual soul) is real. Grief and infatuation are the properties of the body and mind and not of the soul (Jiva); they spring from our fleshy affinities, they do not exist in the transcendental plane. Fearlessness is hence a hallmark of the wise.

June 10, 1992

Five qualities needed to reach God 7.9

Five "adjustments" are needed in our personality to reach God. They are in the nature of preparatory exercises which should be attempted by each one of us. These are: freedom from pride and infatuation, conquering the vice of attachment, dwelling constantly in God, complete disappearance of desires and remaining unaffected by the pairs of opposites such as pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, love and hatred and name and fame. Those who possess these traits will attain the Supreme Being and the unchangeable state of Bliss. These requirements were enunciated by God Himself to Arjuna. in the Bhagavad Gita.

Having described the real form of the world-tree, Lord Krishna in His message said that this deeprooted one should be felled by the sharp sword of non-attachment. This formidable weapon of detachment or dispassion should enable an aspirant

to avoid developing attachment towards children, to wealth and to the world. Such a person should also be strengthened by a resolute bent of mind towards the Supreme Self and sharpened again and again on the whetstone of the practice of true discrimination. Then he should seek for and know the abode of God. The one who has reached this goal will never return to the world. He seeks refuge in the primeval person, from whom has emanated this beginningless flow of creation. The one who desires for the cessation of this worldly thirst for enjoyment should surrender himself to that Lord and worship Him with pure devotion.

Swami Chinmayananda said in his discourse that in his bound state, a man wrongly identifies himself with his perverted ego and tries to lord over the phenomenal world. The evil that makes men tethered to worldly activities is attachment. Such a person will lavish his affection, on his children but to a distant relative, he would not show the same warmth of love. Dwelling constantly in God can be experienced by reading scriptural lore, at least a few verses daily. Those who reach the goal should avoid desires because the same will arise one after another and are hence endless. Joy or sorrow should not toss such a persons up and down. Desires having fled from him without leaving any taint behind, the undeluded should reach the goal... the Lord's abode

November 6, 1992

Gita prescribes charter of duties 7.10

The duties assigned in the scriptures should be carried out by men and women. Where the Law of Righteousness

(Dharma) requires to be strictly enforced, the question of transfer of responsibilities to each other either by men or women, will not arise. The procedure of proxy cannot be applied or adopted in this field. The Lord has declared that His devotees, who stick to the duties enjoined upon them, will never be let down. True devotees need not be concerned about problems because those who have taken refuge in Him are assured of His protection. A guarantee to this effect has been given by Him in the Gita.

If a vow taken by a devotee is found to be in conflict with that of His own, God will see to it that the words of His disciples carry weight. But devotion should not mean an act confined to a few hours a day, expressed in profuse emotional exuberance. Nor is it marked by an extravagant display of the method of worship. The devotion as contained in the Gita is backed by moral considerations. Freed from passion, anger and fear, absorbed in God, taking refuge in Him, purified by spiritual knowledge, they seek His grace.

Sri Vishwesha Thirtha Swami (Pejawar Math) in a discourse gave instances of God giving up His own vow in favour of the one taken by His devotees, indicating His desire to give importance to it. In the Kurukshetra war, the Lord had clearly spelt out His decision not to resort to arms, Bhishma, on the other hand, felt sure that circumstances would compel Him to use arms. The latter won because at one stage, when Bhishma's ferocity reached its climax. Sri Krishna could not remain a spectator seeing His other devotees perish. He rushed towards Bhishma wielding the sacred wheel.

In the Ramayana, Rama was steadfast in His resolve to obey His father's command and spend 14 years in the forest. Bharata was equally determined to see that Rama returned to Ayodhya giving up His vow. He argued that if he should now be considered the King, then he had the

power to transfer the reins of administration to anyone and Rama was its legitimate ruler. Rama fulfilled His obligations to the sages, punished the culprits and then assumed charge of the State. The Gita prescribes the charter of duties, the performance of which is imperative. Adherence to Virtue (Dharma) takes us near God who asks us to submit to Him.

November 25, 1992

Gita shows the way to get God's blessings 7.11

A devotee should remember that the forms of God are many but Truth is one. The names are innumerable but God is one. Religious differences are only cultural differences. Man turns intolerant when he forgets that God exists in all beings and that all paths lead to the realisation of that one reality. "Purify your heart first as hatred, pride and egoism divide one from another."Man should follow the commandment of peace that there is unity in diversity.

The Bhagavad Gita of 700 verses is a constant companion for every man as it embodies in itself an immediate solution to the pressing problems of man and carries a wonderful message of encouragement, hope, cheer and consolation, It is a direct appeal to divinise the entire nature of man. Gita gives him a positive promise of salvation, making him fearless.

Swami Vishnu Devananda in a lecture referred to his master Swami Sivananda's advice to godminded persons that they should bask in the sunshine of Divine love, anoint themselves with the oil of selfless service, wear the raiment of purity

and piety, eat the bread in the name of the Lord, drink the nectar of meditation, perfume themselves with the scent of charity, dive into the Divine source and draw inexhaustible strength therefrom.

Men can derive God's blessings if they live conforming themselves to the commands in the Law of Righteous conduct, do only praiseworthy deeds, abstain from intoxicating drinks, abhor committing sins, lead a contented life, behave humble, keep the heart pure, always associate themselves with the wise, develop dispassion, and discrimination and sing God's praise. The doors of immortality are kept open for those endowed with fortitude, forbearance and discipline. Explaining how Swami Sivananda transformed people by preaching that God is Love, Swami Vishnu Devananda said Divine life enables man to be in tune with God as it represents the synthesis of the fundamental principles of harmony of all religions. Aspirants should beware of cravings, which cause pain, sorrow, unhappiness and re-births, strengthening the ego in men. Though man was born to reach the goal of self-realisation, he is led astray by worldly temptations.

March 30, 1993

Gita is God's recipe to remove grief 7.12

Life should have a purpose and meaning, God Himself has said. Man can live in peace and without problems if he keeps his mind pure. But invariably the mind has wicked propensities which do not allow him to experience happiness. The message for humanity to do its duty and remain free from grief has been given by Sri Krishna in His sermon to Arjuna. God's utterances in His dialogue with Arjuna, called

the Bhagavad Gita, show the way to maintain the balance of mind. Arjuna was only a symbol and through him, the Lord provides us the answer to all our ills.

From time immemorial, Hinduism has been and will be guiding mankind. Its teachings have been interpreted by many. Likewise, the Divine declarations in the Bhagavad Gita have been analysed and commented upon by so many from different angles. There is still scope for new interpretations, revealing how this great Hymn is a source of inspiration for all.

Adi Sankara has referred to the essence of the 18 chapters in just one verse. "For those who deserve no grief, you have shown your poignant feelings. For the living and for the dead, the wise will not grieve." After explaining what Arjuna should do, the Lord concludes, "Abandoning all righteous deeds, seek me as your sole refuge. I will liberate you from all sins. Do not grieve. "Listening to God's exposition, Arjuna replied that his delusion had been destroyed. "I will do as you command.

Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, Kanchi Sankaracharya, in a lecture said that from the sentiments expressed in the Gita, it could be seen how destiny played its role in man's activities. Grief would certainly be experienced but man can remain unaffected by it. Gita is God's recipe to wipe out man's tears. The Lord's dissertation outlines how one should conduct oneself. If the message is applied, there will be no scope for doubts in men.

God resides in our minds which should be kept pure. But bad thoughts are bound to creep in. They can be removed by upholding righteousness. This human document enables men in their journey through life by outlining his charter of duties.

October 4, 1993

Gita asks people to keep the mind pure 7.13

The enormity of Hindu religious literature is such that it will be difficult for all men to study and digest them during their lifetime. The salient features of this great faith and the rights, duties and responsibilities of a person have been provided in the Bhagavad Gita in which the doctrines and the messages of the entire ancient wisdom have been packed. In short, this glorious hymn asks men to keep their mind pure and try to help others. If, however, it is not possible to do so, at least no harm or injury should be done to anyone.

India is gifted with several fine arts, spiritual guidelines and tradition. Their relevance to humanity is mentioned in innumerable sacred texts. Apart from the directives in the Vedas, various teachings and moral codes have been incorporated in the Epics and Puranas. Sciences like Astrology and Ayurveda have also been explained. All aspects of human conduct have been covered. The essence of God's declarations is that everyone should do only noble deeds. Only pious thoughts should fill the hearts.

In the 18 chapters of His celestial song, Lord Krishna has advised men on how to develop an integrated personality, said Sri Vijayendra Saraswathi (Junior Swami of the Kanchi Math). Briefly, the Lord's commands are: to do one's duties, to offer worship and to remain detached by renouncing desires. (Yaja, Bhaja and Thyaja). One should have faith in Divine dispensation. People should carry out religious duties as prescribed and discard worldly desires. Not that should they totally abjure them but they should participate in activities which will gladden God's heart. Above all, there should be

no room for hatred. Based on the Gita, wise men have advised people to develop knowledge about the Divinity and moral courage.

October 5, 1993

Gita, a practical code to man's life 7.14

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, once visiting down south, was propagating the message of the Bhagavad Gita to a huge audience. One among the listeners was in tears and the saint thought this particular person was more impressed and moved by his speech than others. When he was approached, the devotee said he was unlettered and had not understood even a single syllable of the talk. But all the same, he said, he was moved by the ecstatic spectacle of Lord Krishna driving the chariot while Arjuna was seated in it. This grand vision touched his heart and hence the tears, he explained.

Gita is not just a scripture for intellectual appreciation. It is a positive, pragmatic code to regulate man's life and to answer all situations. It is universal in character, dealing primarily with one who has to live in this world, love his neighbours and leave, when the call comes. Life has to be purposeful and the Lord's message in the Gita lays down the dictum that man should be free form malice and be friendly even to one who envies him. He should be ever kind to those who have gone astray and remain ever-balanced. He should be forbearing and forgiving. The Lord says that man should cultivate equanimity even under the most disturbing circumstances. "Look upon friends and foes alike, ignore both

obloquy and honour, be indifferent to praise or blame," Sri Krishna says.

In a lecture, Sri N. Giridhari Prasad said "Devotion is not mere external symbolism. It is a quality of the heart." It is a oneway traffic where one always gives and never takes anything in return. Out of the four types of people who approach God -- to secure worldly benefits, to seek real knowledge, to regain what was lost and to be ever at His service, the supreme devotee submits himself without expecting any reward. Life should also be wedded to daily activities. Mere bland action is 'Karma' but when impregnated with desireless devotion and service, it turns into Karma Yoga, which is doing an act without expecting any return.

The deleterious quality of action is neutralised by desireless service. Salvation is realisation of the soul's eternal function of unalloyed service to God, which is the climax of all duties enjoined by the scriptures. King Janaka attained eternity only by actions done without desire. The Lord says that all acts should be consecrated to Him. As a devotee, one should perform his duties leaving the results to God.

October 8, 1993

A true devotee must do his ordained duties 7.15

Persons who seek divine mercy and guidance may be eager to understand the correct import of certain terms which they come across in the field of religion. Who can be called a devotee? It cannot refer to one who claims himself as devoted. God should acknowledge him as His devotee.

The term Dharma can be applied to those acts which please God. This may vary from time to time and from man to man. For instance, in the Mahabharatha, the Lord asks the most virtuous Yudhishtira to utter a statement which may appear contrary to rules prohibiting utterance of falsehood. But the circumstances of a situation when Drona was ferocious, a shock-treatment of this nature was required. The oft-used word 'Maya' can be defined as God's will.

The sermon on the battlefield of Lord Krishna, called the Bhagavad Gita, explains the manner in which a devotee can please God by carrying out the ordained duties casting aside all desires for the fruits of his actions. God advocates equality of temperament in success or failure. The 'Yoga' prescribed in this holy text means a 'technique' and the Yogi is the technician who is qualified to do his job perfectly, with ease and precision, thereby achieving deservedly the best results. The Gita is a sublime book of technology given to the suffering mankind. God governs the cosmos as per the Divine Laws spelt out in this text. A devotee who knows these Laws and abides by them will be assured of a life full of joy and bliss, devoid of sorrow, stress and tension. Krishna teaches the dejected Arjuna to execute his job to get the best results on both material and spiritual planes. So done, the acts in turn will assure a person a dynamic peaceful life full of contentment and tranquillity.

Sri Anand Teerth Baitmangalkar, in a lecture, said the Lord asks His disciple to cultivate a devotional attitude by the application of pure intelligence and perform his duties disinterestedly. A devotee will be balanced in pleasure and pain and will be ever harmonised. The Lord says that those who strictly follow the gradual steps to spiritual progress related by Him in the Gita, are dear to Him. Devotees should understand that they are mere instruments in the hands of the Lord and realise that He is the indwelling monitor of

all hearts. The core of His message to mankind runs thus: "Take shelter in Me alone as the highest Divinity. I shall deliver you from all sins."

March 19, 1994

Man should cultivate good qualities 7.16

Every human being experiences in his or her life, three different types of modifications in his or her activities, in his or her conduct and attitudes. In the lowest state among the three, there is a predominance of lethargy and heedlessness. In the next stage, he may show restlessness, attachment and thirst for the pleasures of life. The highest state connotes purity, wisdom and happiness. Scriptures indicate that the first two stages of inertia, ignorance, and passion should be discarded and a person should cultivate good qualities and perform his duties dedicating them to God.

The Bhagavad Gita broadly rates these three constituents of worldly activities as the impure, the alloyed and the pure. In the ultimate analysis, he or she should endeavour to gain self-realisation, and give up the initial temperaments and rise to the first, dedicating all activities to the Lord and reach beyond the three states. Sri Krishna has advised aspirants to remain peaceful by absolving themselves from such relative sentiments as honour and dishonour, gain and loss, victory or defeat and desisting from the search after unattainable objects and freeing from anxiety to preserve the obtained objects. (called "Yoga" and "Kshema"). "Attain the highest end in the spiritual realm, beyond the three qualities" says Krishna to Arjuna.

The influence of the three tendencies had been explained by Swami Ramakrishna through a story. A traveller, passing through a dense forest, was attacked suddenly by three robbers. One of them said that the money could be taken and the man killed. The second suggested that after depriving him of the possession, he could be left tied to a tree. The third wanted him to be let free after depriving him of his money. The first and second removed the cash and left the place whereas the third saw to the victim's safe journey till his house and then vanished. The three represent infatuation, passion and purity respectively. (Thamas, Rajas and Satwa).

Sri C. V. Sivaramakrishna Sarma in a discourse, next referred to the unreasonable and adamant nature of a king in demanding from his royal priest to give him the very next day, a practical demonstration of obtaining liberation. The aged scholar was puzzled but his grand-daughter assured him that she could solve the problem. The next morning after securing an assurance from the king that he would obey her directives without questioning them, she took him and her grandfather to a chamber which had two pillars and tied them separately asking them to get the bonds removed. "How can I," each one said as both were kept tied. She explained to the ruler that salvation has to be shown only by one who had himself known and reached that stage. To realise God should be the goal of everyone, gaining enlightenment through spiritual knowledge and getting rid of all types of bondage.

May 23, 1994

Be not as ignorant as musk deer 7.17

In spite of remarkable achievements in various fields, man is unhappy. But everything will be fine for him, if

only he learns to be humble and accept the fact that what he thinks he has gained, was made possible for him by God. He should acknowledge that God has helped him to register the progress he has made and His guidance is absolutely necessary in all his endeavours. Such a faith is necessary as the first step for his spiritual advancement even while he lives in this material world.

Saint Ramadas once visited an Anjaneya temple. The priest, who felt himself to be a very important person and went out to fetch water, ignoring the presence of Ramdas who prostrated behind his back. This was repeated even after the priest returned. The peculiar conduct of the visitor surprised the priest who asked him why he prostrated behind him. Ramdas replied that the salutations were not for him but to Anjaneya who had entered the temple when the priest left and made his exit when the priest came back. The latter realised his guilt of not displaying humility despite his learning.

Real happiness does not lie in satisfying one's desires. Love and attachment bind men, causing despair. Refusing to be lured by their glamour, man should direct his attention towards God. Happiness thus lies in transcending the worldly attraction. Like the deluded musk deer which does not know that the scent emanates from a gland in its body, a person fails to realise that the source of joy is within him, i.e. his own Self. Two verses in Bhagavad Gita present a fine picture of a man's gradual process of self-destruction. Attachment formed by musing on objects, generates desire, which when not fulfilled, produces anger, as a result of which the capacity to discriminate fails and man feels unhappy. To illustrate how desires form a chain, Sri Ganapathi Satchidananda Swami said a saint wanted to initiate a disciple who expressing his gratitude, first wanted to get married and lead a family life for a brief period. Later, he sought more time to see his child grow and then for him to study. Several years later,

the miseries of life made him go to the master, who took him to the seashore. Gazing at the ocean, the saint stood for a long time when the disciple felt uneasy at the delay. "I am waiting for the waves to subside when alone the time will be ripe for initiation" said the saint making him realise his folly in expecting all desires to subside. "Remember God when you are happy, forget yourself when you are in sorrow."

May 28, 1994

Overcome challenges with God's help 7.18

Repeated attempts to reform, discipline and make humanity conform to the Rule of Law have not resulted in success. Yet out of compassion, there is one Supreme Authority who, without getting vexed, continues his endeavour. That extraordinary force is God as He alone is concerned about the spiritual progress of men. He guides them and protects them through His message. There are bound to be challenges in man's life but they should be surmounted with God's help instead of getting upset, just as one who has to perforce go out during rain dons a rain coat or holds an umberalla for a cover. The Bhagavad Gita serves such a purpose to enable man to tide over problems.

The celestial song of Krishna asks us to live in the presence of God; the Lord's imperative has tremendous redeeming power to boost our lost causes. This sermon urges us to uphold Moral Law. To sermonise is easy, but everyone knows how difficult it is to follow the directives. The Gita emerged after God himself practised the Divine commands. In his

incarnation as Rama, the Lord put them into practice and very rarely spelt out the message. As Krishna, he preached what was carried out in His earlier manifestation. The Gita is the essence of the Upanishads served by the Lord to us. The former contains several of "Mantras" which also spread His messages but they have to be handled with extreme care, adopting proper procedure and discipline. The Gita is a hymn in which are hidden the Divine commands and can be rendered as a song by anyone, though the contents have to explained by teachers.

In a discourse, Sri Chinna Sriman Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami explained how God sustains all His creations from the day they are born, keeping ready the nourishment required for their growth. Men are grieved when they see others possessing articles which they feel they are denied. They will be happy if the articles are lost or spoilt. Thus out of desire and attachment, they make their own lives miserable. What they should cultivate is control of the mind and secondly, not misuse the power of speech gifted to them by God, by taking care not to offend others.

In His various incarnations, God tried to change the attitudes of men but failed. Still without losing hope, He presented the Gita. To ensure that men progressed in their lives, He prescribed the scriptures but people violated them. As Rama, He demonstrated his absolute dependence on righteousness to win the admiration of even an adversary who declared him to be replica of Virtue (Dharma). Krishna in the Gita pinpoints how men should conduct themselves, and lead their lives in accordance with a pattern and procedure.

July 5, 1994

Equanimity of mind essential in life 7.19

Life is a great mystery. We do not know from where we have come and what will happen the next moment or after our life here in the world. We see a great variety of inanimate and animate beings in nature and deduce that there must be a superior force which is controlling all the forces of nature. The mystics and the sages have with their intuitive insight perceived this supreme power as the immanent being in all the creation, which the theists call 'God'.

There is only one God, though He is called by different names. How can we know God? The Vedas are the final authority and they are not man-made. They are revelations of sages. We can also look for guidance to the writings of sages like Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parasara, based on their memory of the Vedas. The Bhagavad Gita also expounds the same truth revealed in the Vedas, and it is important because it has been taught by the Lord Himself in one of His incarnations.

What is the reason for the biological variations we see in the world? Why is one child born hale and hearty, while another one deformed? If we analyse such anomalies in nature we have to accept the working of a Law which is the reason for all this, which the scriptures call 'Karma'. Once we understand that it is our own Karma which is responsible for our happiness and sorrow in this life, we can learn to lead our lives in the right way.

The Gita says, "The wise man to whom pain and pleasure are alike, and who is not tormented by these contacts, becomes eligible for immortality". So it enjoins us to live amidst the world, detached like a lotus leaf in the water, by developing equanimity of mind and remaining contented with whatever comes our way in life. Both sorrow and happiness must be faced in the same spirit.

In a lecture Sri V. N. Gopala Desikan said, the Gita does not teach that one should renounce everything in life. One has to live in the world within the limits of Dharma, remaining detached and contented. To emphasise this, he related that Sage Yajnavalkya held Janaka of Mithila in high esteem among his pupils, which the others felt was due to the fact that he was a king. To prove the king's detachment to others, he made one of his disciples tell the king during the class, that Mithila was on fire. Much to the astonishment of everyone, the king remained totally unconcerned and continued with his studies. The other pupils immediately ran helter skelter forgetting their lessons. Irrespective of one's station in life, one can remain detached.

February 16, 1995

Spiritual seeking intended for all 7.20

Many people mistakenly imagine that spiritual life and study of sacred texts are intended only for a few. When a person says. "I am not an ascetic" he seems to feel that those who have renounced the world are different. It is in this connection that the Lord's message in the Bhagavad Gita is valid. It is a scripture intended for all, more so for ordinary men. All spiritual practices are intended for everyone in the universe. It tells men how their lives can be kept pure, and leads them by the hand, to their respective goals. It says "Let a man raise the Self, by the Self, and not debase himself".

One of the important lessons taught in the song celestial refers to the manner of developing the power of meditation.

Three factors govern its process: one-pointedness of mind, setting bounds to one's life and to achieve it and thirdly maintaining equanimity or evenness of vision. To achieve them one needs the help of constant practice and detachment. Whatever may be the nature of one's assignment, the mind should concentrate on it. A story is told of a person hit by an arrow. The pain was unbearable and any attempt to remove it would have worsened the pain. It was removed when he was engaged in his prayer as his mind was fixed on God and he did not know what was happening outside.

The Bhagavad Gita points out how when a man is caught in illusion, he will not be able to face the naked fact of his lapse from duty. A Judge may send hundreds of criminals to gallows but when his own son is produced before him, accused of murder, he will hesitate and may sermonise that death penalty is inhuman. His words are born of attachment. Arjuna's behaviour was like that of the Judge.

The Gita, the practical universal gospel, is the most sublime production and is the voice of God, said Swami Vimalananda in a lecture. Krishna whose preachings are for people in the entire world, states that life is a battle wherein the forces of good and evil, the divine and the demoniacal, purity and passion are ceaselessly at war. Mind, the Senses, Jealousy, Pride, Hypocrisy are all man's enemies.

The Divine song embodies in itself a solution to all the pressing problems of man and carries a message of hope, encouragement, cheer and consolation. The contents divinise the entire nature of man. The Gita harmonises the philosophies of action, devotion and knowledge. The three horses of this body-chariot -- action, emotion and intellect, should work in perfect harmony. One can find a solution for all doubts. The more one studies the work with devotion and faith, the

more one will obtain deeper knowledge, penetrative insight and clarity of thinking.

April 22, 1995

God, the permanent companion 7.21

Immersed in worldly activities, man generally toils day and night and by some means goes through his ordeals and escapes. Time waits for no one and in this fast changing background, he manages to earn and spend. But each one should introspect on what distinction he has achieved and whether he has taken any step to reach the goal of emancipation. "What have I gained in this precious life and have I utilised the opportunity provided by God in a proper manner" should be the self-enquiry he should make. Our forebears who had been steeped in spiritual traditions had left for posterity the methods to secure Divine grace. They had said that the mind should be kept absolutely conditioned, which meant that the physical body, the Senses and the mind ought to be utilised to think about the God-man relationship, to utter His names and to offer service to Him. When he worships, naturally the mind will have to be kept tamed so as to enjoy peace.

But many have not been able to resort to spiritual exercises which will lead them to God. They usually say, "These days (when I am young) are not intended for religious pursuits. There is enough time and I can take to religion at a later stage." This is their general attitude but little do they realise that as age advances, all the sense faculties will fail to respond. On the day when he is to fast, he will feel more hungry and when he is asked to keep awake on a Sivarathri day,

he will get sleep early. There is absolutely no guarantee that he can think clearly in his old age.

Hence, wise men have tendered genuine advice that younger days are more conducive to developing devotion and be of service to God. When his body is trim, words flow without falter, mind takes quick decisions and eyesight is sharp, a person should think of God and adopt measures which will lead him to God's vicinity. Such a tendency to be God-minded should arise, not from suggestions made by others but by one's own volition.

Sri Bharathi Thirtha Swami of Sringeri Sarada Peetam in a discourse cited in this connection the words of the Lord in the Gita: "Let a man lift up himself who is drowned in the ocean of transmigration. Let him not lower himself for he alone is the friend of himself. No other friend can lead him to liberation from this sea of distress. Mind under different circumstances is both a friend and a foe to the soul. It is a friend to one who has full control of Self and an enemy when he has not checked its vagaries." God alone is man's permanent companion and so what one should consider as a real achievement is not to merely accumulate wealth or seek fame and position but to meditate on God, utter His names, offer worship to Him and thereby earn His pleasure and obtain His grace.

June 8, 1995

Man must not shirk his duties 7.22

The clarion call of the Lord to take refuge in Him, when a sincere devotee finds it difficult to adopt the charter of

duties, leaving the responsibility of steering him through the worldly activities in His hands, has been misunderstood by some that God will provide them all their needs and that they need not do anything. God never asks anyone to sit idle hoping to be served all that they want, on a platter. Far from it. God wants everyone to do the enjoined duties without motivation, desire or anticipating rewards.

In His Bhagavad Gita, God lays great emphasis on human effort, along with devotion to Him, not swept off by unwholesome emotion, or obsessed by the anticipation of the benefits of one's acts. The Mahabharatha provides solutions for all the ills that man may experience and the Gita forming part of it, is a document that outlines not only his Godward journey, but a list of duties, the performance of which will secure him well being.

The special appeal of the Gita is to a person who stands bewildered at the crossroads wondering how to get rid of the various problems. God gives His confidential advice to him in his hour of distress. The message in the poem will enable him to face and not avoid action. The Gita is not opposed to action. Its ethics is not anti-hedonistic. It urges the man in dilemma to shake off his faint-heartedness. Devotion and duty are the essential requirements for him to lead a life of poise. The duty should be dedicated to God giving up the desire for the fruit.

The Lord in His directives given through this hymn refers to the three fundamental evils which man should abhor, viz, attachment, ego and desires. The Gita does not oppose human pleasure but wants man to enjoy life in such a way not opposed to the Law of Virtue. Its attitude is positive. His attachment should be diverted from material activities towards spiritual duties, placing total reliance on God. Man should not be gripped by delusion. He should not be completely immersed

in sorrow when grief strikes him nor be elated when praise is showered on him. The Gita Doctrine of Moderation stands for sublimation.

Sri Sugunendra Thirtha Swami in a discourse referred to the undue pride of a person when he achieves success in his endeavour forgetting that it was God, the unseen, who had helped him. But man's ego is so powerful that he will claim, "I have done it." What the Lord explains is that all human activities are governed by the Law He had made. The Lord's message includes the steps to check the mind which can be achieved by practice. It refers to the chain reaction which is the result of unbridled desires and adds that control of mind can be effected by constant vigilance and practice of dispassion.

August 31, 1995

Fearlessness, a great virtue 7.23

One among the chief traits which sages through their writings, called on humanity to cultivate, related to fearlessness. Whether one likes it or not, life is indeed a battlefield. Fear is the most ignoble among all emotions, as it often degrades a person's morals and destroys his mind. The main thrust of the message in the Bhagavad Gita is the plea to the timid men to cast off their weaknesses and vacillations and don the armour of faith, devotion and duty. The Lord's imperative in this celestial song is profound as He asks men to develop strength and shake off faint-heartedness.

To acquire such a balance of mind is not possible all of a sudden. Constant introspection of his own Self, as where

exactly he had faltered, what were the reasons for him to feel happy or sorrowful will provide him with a determination to overcome these lapses and correct himself so as to stand erect in later days. The direct, but not immediate, result of this will be the spontaneous cultivation of fearlessness, which is the first among the 26 Divine qualities enumerated by the Lord in His Gita.

The message of the Lord points out that men come to this world with the impression of their past actions and return with something. This heritage that they bring with them is either godly or ungodly, the former helping to deliver them from bondage, the latter tightening it. Fearlessness has been declared to be at the top of the godly heritage of virtues, followed by other good qualities like self-restraint, purity, unoffensiveness, charity and compassion.

Those who had acted against the will of their parents or disregarded the advice of the elders and rebelled against the directives enshrined in the scriptures will harbour the feeling of fear. When even demi-gods were afraid of Ravana, he himself was filled with fear when he abducted Sita. Thus one who gets involved in evil deeds will suffer from such a sense of fear, said Sri N. Giridhari Prasad in a lecture, adding that a realisation of his guilt will lead him progressively on the spiritual path.

Saint Ramalinga Swamigal in his Thiruvarutpa, enjoins upon devotees to develop this trait of fearlessness, particularly of one's impending death. Saint Thirunavukkarasar in a hymn sings that servants of the Lord would not consider themselves vassals of anyone and would not even mind the arrival of the God of Death. The Lord in His Gita has explained that the fundamental injunction is to lead a pure devotional life in obedience to scriptures. When a man gets rid of his fear through his Godly life and acquisition of knowledge, he will

be cautious not to indulge in wrongs. Fearlessness is the commander of all good qualities in the battle raging between virtue and vice in men.

December 11, 1995

Ultimate happiness to be found within 7.24

One of the fundamental mistakes that a human being makes is to equate comforts with happiness. No doubt, everyone desires to remain happy. Material objects are indeed necessary but they alone cannot fetch the happiness he needs. To secure academic distinctions a person can go to an educational institution; when he wants money, he approaches a bank; to obtain a job, he seeks a placement in a factory and when he wants articles for his day-to-day existence he purchases them from a shopping centre. But, where should he go to obtain happiness?

It is necessary to realise that this happiness is within oneself. One need not go anywhere. The ultimate goal before man is to be happy and he can find that both happiness and unhappiness lie within him. As they cannot co-exist, he has to take steps to get rid of the latter. He should search "within" and probe "who am I"?

A person may be an expert driver and may drive carefree on the highway, yet he cannot be reckless as other vehicles will be following him. Hence he has to observe the traffic rules. Discipline is necessary in life. In this connection, one should remember that a person's conduct should not be judged by "what he is" but "who he is". A holy man may be accused of wrongs but on that score saintliness itself should not be condemned.

Explaining how a person seeks happiness in his life, Swami Suddhananda (Samvit Sagar Trust) in a lecture on the relevance of Bhagavad Gita said, a human being should consider himself as the very source of happiness. A young man was keen to obtain a degree. "What for?" he was asked. "To get a job," he replied. When sought to know what next, he said "to earn money, to enjoy a comfortable living with a good house and car." Why all these? He said "to experience happiness." Where will he obtain it? The ultimate happiness is the spirit in us, the Divine within.

Arjuna made a difference between his kinsmen and others in the battlefront and Krishna demonstrated that this was a vain distinction explaining what the "Self" and "non-Self" meant and how the soul within is permanent while the body will perish. Krishna devoted a part of His sermon to explain renunciation of action as such and the discipline of Selfless action. But, of the two, performance of action is better than renunciation.

March 21, 1996

Humility necessary for scriptural study 7.25

It is the ego of man which stands as a barrier between him and God. All spiritual disciplines are enjoined by the scriptures to obliterate man's ego. The discipline of Karma yoga is based on the selfless performance of one's duties, so that, a person is freed from the binding nature of actions.

Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita enjoins upon man to surrender to Him giving up all Dharma. By this unequivocal surrender the devotee becomes a willing instrument of the

Divine. By surrendering the ego, man is absolved of all his sins.

It therefore follows that the devotee has to perform all his worldly duties without expectation of results, with his mind always absorbed in Divine contemplation. When all actions are performed with the spirit of surrender to God, due to total communion of the Self with the Divine, all of them become effortless and such a devotee, is able to tune into the immense power of the Infinite.

After teaching the way of Self-surrender, the Lord touches upon the essential requisites to undertake a study of the Gita. All kinds of spiritual discipline involve avoiding both extremes. So whatever one does must be in moderation which involves control of the body, Senses and the mind, with total mastery over oneself without becoming a slave to their demands. One who is engrossed in material comforts and indulgence in them cannot grasp this teaching.

In his lecture Swami Paramarthananda said, devotion to God was imperative while undertaking any spiritual pursuit. When approaching God who is the Infinite capable of giving eternal bliss, one should not seek measely worldly ends from Him. So, true devotion is the ardent desire for liberation. Scriptural study of the Gita can be undertaken only when one has true devotion.

Further this esoteric teaching cannot be imparted to one forcefully when the mind will be unable to grasp the subtleties of this spiritual knowledge. An aspirant must have an ardent desire to listen to this teaching from a qualified teacher for it to bear fruit, which is the end of Self-realisation.

Finally, the Lord cautions that His teaching is intended for those who can learn it with an open mind, the reason

being that there are people who are always critical about everything they approach, only with the intention of finding faults with it. If while studying it, the meaning does not become clear, one should have the humility and perseverance to study it again and again to understand it, with the conviction that the teaching of the Lord will not be beset with logical contradictions.

August 19, 1996

Human life must be purposeful 7.26

The nature and attitude of an individual as well as the values he cherishes have totally changed now. For instance, about three decades ago, the youth despite their progressive outlook would have agreed to their marriage being arranged by their parents and they may not do so now. What is necessary now is to enable man know his own Self and his role in society. The ignorance he suffers from should be removed. He should be made aware of the existence of a superior force. Life can be made fruitful and purposeful or destroyed according to one's choice like water being used to quench thirst or to drown a person.

It will be foolish for a person to ask the poor to recite the Divine names when he is hungry and is in immediate need of a morsel of food. The educational equipment of a person makes him greedy and if he happens to employ workers, he can with the power he wields, remove any one of them from his job. Only human beings are prone to command the young ones to carry out a task or ask them to desist from doing a thing. Animals and birds have no such tendency.

An example of a man's present position may be likened to that of a stag that is proud of its horns and admires its reflection in water. But on hearing the roar of an approaching tiger it will run fast only to get caught amidst bushes because of it horns.

In his discourse Swami Suddhananda (Samvit Sagar Trust) said, one to understand what life meant, an example can be cited; A young Sanyasi once got himself locked inside a cottage and people presumed he was engaged in meditation. When he did not emerge even after two days, they opened the room, only to find him fully drunk. He was not a Sanyasi but a drunkard posing as a Sanyasi. A litterateur may not become a Sadhu but the latter can turn a litterateur. A politician is not corrupt but a corrupt man has become angry with others.

It is in this connection that knowledge of the Self is necessary for a person and the question raised by Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita becomes relevant. It is imperative for a man to discover himself.

The Lord says that those with their steadfast minds strive for liberation from decay and death and realise in full the underlying Reality, the innermost individual Self. Arjuna wanted to know who the supreme one was and what action was, the nature of the Self and the physical and Divine regions.

January 26, 1997

Noble birth, result of spiritual merit 7.27

In spiritual life whatever þrogress is gained is never lost even if one does not experience the ultimate state of Self-realisation in this birth. Spiritual knowledge which one

acquires remains with one and in the next birth one is born in an environment conducive to spiritual growth. This doubt was raised by Arjuna to Lord Krishna when He expounded the way of meditation to him.

Meditation and such spiritual practices involve a certain amount of reorientation of life, a turning away from material pursuits for the sake of a higher value. Naturally, a spiritual aspirant who is practising meditation sincerely, at some point might get a doubt whether all his efforts would be futile if he does not attain Moksha in this life.

The Gita says clearly that for one who has practised meditation and has not realised the end in this life two possibilities are possible. Whatever good merit (punya) that would have accumulated had he performed Karma instead of meditation will accrue to a Yogi and hence he would after this life go to heaven and enjoy the pleasures there. Otherwise such a Yogi is reborn immediately in a noble family where his spiritual growth will not be hampered.

In his lecture Swami Swaroopananda said, birth in a good family is rare and is the result of merit gained in previous births. This fact can be seen in the lives of saints. Jnaneshwar's life is a standing example of this fact. Right from birth he and his brothers and sister, five of them, were indifferent to the world and were great devotees of God. Even their birth was divinely ordained. Jnaneshwar's father was not interested in family life but was forced to marry. He became a recluse and one day his Guru happened to visit his house for alms and as is customary blessed the lady that she would have children. Hearing this she broke down in tears and when he came to know that her husband had abandoned her and become his disciple, the Swami sent his disciple back

home to fulfil the blessing he had given to the lady. Thus was born Jnaneshwar and his brothers and sister who were all highly evolved spiritually even at birth. Since their father had taken to a family life after renouncing it first, the family was ostracized by the society and without any opportunity for employment they had to face grinding poverty. The parents ended their lives unable to face the hostility of the people but all the five children became renowned saints.

February 14, 1997

Scriptures relevant to practical life 7.28

Views about the nature of devotion to God always vary. Some feel that it consists of merely ceremonial rituals like gathering flowers, offering worship, going on pilgrimage and visiting temples. Some may conduct these rituals elaborately. No doubt they are necessary, but by themselves they cannot constitute devotion. These represent one of its aspects.

Some are of the opinion that shedding tears copiously indicates real devotion. It is not mere emotional rapture that counts. Because there are no tears, it cannot be concluded that a person does not have Bhakti. Nor can it be said that only non-intellectuals can resort to it. There were many outstanding and accomplished devotees.

How then can this term be explained? What are the various means to cultivate it and what are the obstacles which may crop when it is resorted to? How to remove the same and what can be the real nature of a true devotee? These are all questions which have been dealt with by Lord Krishna

in a brilliant but succinct manner in 20 verses in the Bhagavad Gita, the sermon on the battlefield in Kurukshetra, ages ago, and this gospel has been elucidated by many.

A lot of discussion has been taking place about the contents of the Lord's message -- about Self-knowledge, meditation, devotion, action and the like. One doubt arises as to how all these topics could have been dealt with on the battlefield and that too in such a short time and the relevance of this to the present day.

Swami Thejomayananda (Chinmaya Mission) in his discourse said, action and knowledge appeared to be different. Some lay stress on performing action while many believe in acquiring knowledge alone. Yet some others hold the view that just uttering the names of the Lord would suffice. Do these views really differ from one another? The Bhagavad Gita clarifies all these aspects. It is true that life is nothing but action. In other words, action has been described as the insignia of life. Wherever there is action, it should have a purpose or a vision and an attitude. This vision is knowledge and the attitude can be equated with emotion. All the three are to be integrated.

As Arjuna stood facing the armies, his mind became confused. His knowledge was blurred by emotion and there was no vision. One should reflect on the teachings in the Gita. Sometimes these discussions may appear unnecessary or as abstract philosophy and impractical. The Lord's words have relevance and He had taken Arjuna step by step towards the final goal. Arjuna's whole attitude changed when he saw the cosmic vision. "Forgive me," he said urging the Lord to illumine him.

August 27, 1997

Desire induces man to commit sins 7.29

It is understandable that evil persons are prone to indulge in misdeeds. Why should even those who wish to abstain from unrighteousness, commit sin? It is as if a man is being forced to err, akin to a servant ordered by an employer to perform some task, does exactly the opposite "Impelled by what, does a person, even though reluctant, commit sin as if he were compelled? This doubt was raised years ago by a confused individual before God whose reply contains the cause of all evil. "Desire and anger born out of man's triple qualities are his foes."

The chief enemy is desire from which evil springs in all beings. When this desire happens to be obstructed by some cause, then it gets transformed into anger. Thus anger is a manifestation of desire. Everything in the world comprises three qualities -- one which is responsible for a peaceful, happy disposition, the second for an overactive, attached nature and third, indolence and sloth. Desire, the Lord says, is born out of the third quality. Only when a man is in the grip of desire does he commit sin. The doubt about evil and the answer to clear it are in the Bhagavad Gita. Krishna illustrates how desire affects, by giving three examples which convey the gradations in the covering of knowledge by desire. "Just as fire is enveloped by smoke, a mirror by dirt and as a foetus is enclosed in the womb, so too is knowledge covered by desire".

The wise man knows, even before suffering the consequences, that he has been led by desire to evil ways. So, he feels extremely sorry and in his case, it is his enemy. On the other hand, the ignorant regard desire, at the time of their thirsting for objects, as a friend. Only when grief arises that an unwise man realises that he has been rendered miserable by desire. "Never is desire satiated by enjoyment just as fire cannot be put out by pouring ghee into it."

Explaining the source of all evil, Sri Abhinava Vidya Thirtha Swami of Sringeri, in one of his discourses, said according to Krishna who had delivered the eternal message in the Gita to mankind. "The Senses, the mind and the intellect are the seats of this enemy." Veiling knowledge, they delude the embodied soul. The Lord has also indicated that the Senses are dangerous for they forcibly carry away the mind of even a striving wise man. Hence to conquer desire, the Senses should be controlled. One who is keen to realise God, should not only eliminate desire, anger and greed, but also the three types of impure mental tendencies.

November 4, 1997

Develop equanimity of mind 7.30

"Man questions and God answers." This can said to be the distinguishing feature of the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord's sermon on the battlefield. Man is constantly beset with problems, inexplicable fear, conflicts and doubts but he gets the solution, in this testament of faith, and a universal scripture, in the form of a dialogue between a teacher and disciple. The foremost lesson from the Lord's message is that man should accept whatever happens in life as the will of God and maintain his balance of mind. Poise enables him to remain undisturbed by the consequences of his acts.

When he first saw the enemy forces, consisting of his teachers and relatives. Arjuna though that it would be sinful to kill them, but he also felt that to leave the evil forces go scot-free without punishing them would be wrong. He wanted to know from the Lord, who was acting as his charioteer, how he could deal with the situation without incurring the

sin of killing them. "Not only is there no sin in the discharge of your duty, if you walk away from it, it is sin." Then follows the discussion between them.

In her discourse, Smt. Prema Pandurang referred to the popular verse comparing the Upanishads to a cow, Krishna to the milk-man, Arjuna to the calf, the Gita to milk and the good and wise men to the partakers of this elixir. The Lord calls Arjuna as the "Son of Kunti" to point out how she had faced sufferings, yet maintained balance of mind. Asking him to cast away faint-heartedness, Krishna said the mind can be controlled not only by constant practice but by obtaining the grace of the Lord and by getting associated with pious souls. Association with them helps overcome depression and there will be enrichment of knowledge, while positive approach to problems will be developed, "Bear all that comes before you with patience. God is with you."

Krishna points out how sense-perception is either pleasant or painful. Weal and woe are felt by the Senses and are therefore transient and one should learn to tolerate them without getting disturbed and endure them patiently. One who is not moved by pleasure or pain of this relative world, deserves the blissful realisation of the Self (immortality). By this, the Lord urges men to get rid of fear and face problems with faith by surrendering to Him. Krishna next explains that the physical body is ephemeral whereas, the soul within is eternal. The knowers of this unmixed Truth have definitely made a distinction between Reality and unreality and, between substance and shadow. The soul can never be destroyed while the body will perish.

November 18, 1997

Tempting influences should be resisted 8.1

Can a person continue to indulge in misdeeds with impunity and yet claim that God, out of His compassion, will excuse him? He cannot and, indeed, a deterrent punishment will be extended to anyone who commits adultery. Scriptures lay the responsibility for moral lapse on men and women equally, although the chances of men yielding to lust are greater. The desire to possess other women is an unpardonable crime. The tendency to seek intimacy with women has been inherent right from the time society was formed and will remain till the days of cataclysm. On this score, it is vain to contend that sex urge being a natural phenomenon and difficult to be curbed, there is nothing wrong in one going astray or coveting another main's wife. The merits, wealth, position and reputation of a man will crumble if he loses his character.

For those who may resort to this perverted argument, scriptures pose a counter-question. Can a man who seeks the company of many women reconcile to a situation of his wife moving closely with other men. The very idea is loathsome. Everyone should recall, when lured by lust, the solemn vow taken during the wedding ceremony that both will remain loyal to each other for ever and will not give room for suspicion. Violation of this code will entail God's displeasure.

In a discourse, Sri, S.R. Themozhiar referred to Saint Thiruvalluvar's analysis of chastity and continence. One of the reasons for men and women mixing freely in modern days without any restriction is "permissiveness". If moral code should be followed, man should not provide scope or create conditions whereunder women may turn infidel. Unbridled freedom should be prevented. Opportunities wherein baser instincts are likely to be kindled should be denied to both.

Scriptures plead with men to develop the capacity to control the Senses, remain virtuous and treat every women as a mother or a sister. Women too should beware of innumerable pitfalls as any taint suffered out of their weakness will last for life.

July 11, 1983

Righteous conduct is true nobility 8.2

When all virtues are weighed and tested, good conduct will be found the best. The soul which is lost, says poet Thiruvalluvar, will never come back to the body; so too righteous conduct. It is an asset that cannot be easily acquired. One should not fear death but should certainly be afraid of disgrace. Good conduct will constitute the seed of blessedness while the bad will yield endless wretchedness. A well-disciplined life will make a man stand any test, whatever be his status. Greatness goes with a life of good behaviour; disgrace attends those who discard the value of character. Bad conduct will lead a man to the brink of ruin. It is virtue and not birth, which makes us mighty. Even those born in a family that is considered low, will become, by their spotless character, sublimated into those of a superior family. On the other hand, those in a higher caste family, may be degraded into those of an ordinary family when they give up their righteous conduct.

Discussing the ideals set in "Thirukkural" before a householder and the efforts to be taken to uphold the code of noble conduct. Pandit V. Natesan in a discourse, said there might be many religions but morality is one. It is religion in practice. No life can grow properly unless it is dedicated and orderly. Like water from high falls is turned into energy when sent through a tunnel, life should pass through rigorous

discipline to achieve success. Man's self-control will place him amidst a band of immortals. He should display utter humility. More than this, he should guard himself against the use of his words. A blister caused through fire will one day heal but the scar made by uncharitable remarks through one's tongue will remain indelible. "He who humbles himself shall be exalted". Abhor evil and cling to what is good only, scriptural texts plead with mankind. Righteous conduct is true nobility.

June 26, 1987

A pure expression of human thought 8.3

Virtue, makes a man on earth, famous, in his grave, illustrious and in the heaven, immortal. When a person follows unfailingly, the prescribed codes of conduct and adopts the spiritual injunctions given according to his status, righteousness will flourish. With the growth of pious behaviour, sins will wane; with their gradual obliteration, one's nescience will go; with that, a keen comprehension of the difference between the evanescent and the eternal, a bitter taste and dislike for moribund pleasures of this life and a strong realisation of the afflictions of birth will begin to appear. There will be a thirst for getting released from bondage.

Elaborate explanation on Virtue and the most valuable guidelines on domestic and social life are contained in one of the best Tamil literary works. Thirukkural, which consists of 1,330 couplets. It is divided into three segments dealing with virtue, wealth and love.

Thirukkural by poet Thiruvalluvar and Thiruvachagam by Manickavachagar are said to be the body and soul of Tamil, the former enabling a person to build his character, the latter,

feeding his soul. The Kural develops the intellect and brain, making men live with honour, honesty and dignity. The Thiruvachagam purifies the soul of its dross and dirt, melts and moulds it to enjoy eternal Bliss. One lays the foundation for and the other constructs the building in the Kingdom of God. A perfect mosaic in itself, the Thirukkural is the purest expression of human thought. Humility, charity and forgiveness are inculcated by the moralist, Pandit V. Natesanar said in the discourse.

The couplets have been elaborated by equally eminent scholars. Do all the good you can; by all the means, in all ways, in all places, at all times and as long as ever, one commentator says. When a person spends ill-gotten money over entertainment of guests, the good effects due to accrue therefrom will go only to the owner of the money who was duped. The evil consequences will follow the guilty. The woman is the salvation or destruction of a family as she carries its destiny in the folds of her mantle. A woman should win her husband's attention by her veil of modesty, robes of chastity, ornaments of meekness and jewels of faith.

July 10, 1990

Duties that please celestials 8.4

Nearly 2,000 years ago, one of the greatest Tamil poet-reformers, Thiruvalluvar, had posed a question why some people alone were wise while a majority were not so intelligent, were not so rich or were not physically fit.

He had himself given the answer to this riddle by stating that the former, who were a few, had earned God's favour by having carried out the duties which pleased Him, whereas the latter had failed to discharge their pious obligations and had thus been denied Divine grace.

Among the many forms of spiritual duties is the ceremony to appease the chief of the celestials (Indra), to ensure that Nature lavishes her bounty on humanity. Service to God and other deities associated with Him, in any form, is deemed as service to society.

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse referred to the story of a commoner who was made a scholar in a trice, as it were. The person was a servant in the kitchen where the offerings to God were being prepared. From Srirangam where he worked, he went one day to the neighbouring pilgrim centre, Tiruvanaikkoil and was, by force of circumstances, made to stay inside the Divine Mother's shrine during the night when he was personally blessed by the latter and emerged as a distinguished poet - by scribbling a few words on his tongue. He turned out to be the illustrious Kalamegam.

Supernatural events are being witnessed even now when God chooses to prove His supreme powers. But prayers and observances of austerities like "Sankranti" festivals are needed. The Vedic mantras carry the appeals to various deities. They ask people to be faithful upholders of the rules God had laid, one of them being the need to seek the company of only the pious who will inculcate in us, a sense of humility. Rain makes no distinction when it pours but the quality of the water that we use changes according to the nature of the soils on which it lands, like murky, sweet and brackish. Worship of God and the company of the Godly persons will remove our defects and fetch us Divine grace.

January 16, 1991

The marks of the truly great 8.5

The worthy and noble traits of a person are to be assessed not by his scholastic attainments, his wealth, his status nor

the power he may wield. All those having such distinctions cannot be considered "great" because they may not be cultured and may be utterly selfish, lacking in sympathy towards humanity. Likewise, just because some are born in the lower strata or are not well qualified or may be occupying a low position, they should not be treated as ignoble. The really great are those who are humble, modest, free from insolent pride and who are considerate towards all other fellow beings. They will uphold tradition, display a cultured approach and utter only soft words.

Saint Thiruvalluvar, who gave to the world, the classic, "Thirukkural" in 1330 couplets, deals with morals and ethics. His statements were prophetic and marked by a desire to help men attain perfection. He deals with the real merits of people held in glory. Just because some are placed aloft, they should not behave as though they alone can guide others. The vulture which soars in the sky, spots a deer, running on the surface, swoops suddenly, attacks it and in a trice carries away its eyes. Likewise, a stork, which leaps so gracefully and looks so sleek, has its aim, only to catch the fish. Because they fly high, these birds cannot be called the best among their category. On the other hand, there are several varieties of creepers, tubers and green plants, which thrive on the surface and yet they are highly beneficial to mankind, as herbs, medicinal roots and to provide nourishment. They cannot be treated as worthless and on that score trampled upon.

Sri S.R. Themozhiar in a lecture about the relevance of the monumental document on human conduct, refers to many among the lowly-placed, who are men of integrity and of impeccable character. To those who demand proof about God, these pious souls will make them experience His presence. The Nayanmars, the Azhwars and in recent times, apostles like Ramalinga Swamigal were of this type who were simple

but Divine. As guides, they led people on the path of virtue. Their thoughts, words and deeds were identical.

February 12, 1991

Prayer nourishes the soul 8.6

What is the necessity to worship God and what purpose does devotion serve - these questions have been raised by some even long time ago. Anticipating the same, even our sages have answered that even as the food we consume is intended to provide us with nourishment and the growth of the body as well as the Sense faculties, so too prayers are needed to enable us to develop moral strength and spiritual energy without which it will be difficult to face life's problems.

God is not a commodity to be purchased but a little self-enquiry will make us realise that He resides within everyone of us, guiding our activities. He reveals Himself to His devotees in forms as they wish to see Him, granting the power to discriminate and and act. Apart from the forms given, devotees also assign Him different names. A man who wanted to conduct research about the presence of God, analysed the five elements, ether, earth, water, fire and air but could not get satisfactory result until he was made to understand that God is inside his body and that he can have His vision, by clearing the "forests" within, meaning, "by purifying his mind". All that a sincere devotee should seek from Him is to seek the end of the cycle of life and death. Saint Thiruvalluvar in the very first couplet in his "Thirukkural" has worded the contents

so ingeniously that every religionist believes that his God has been referred to by the author.

Sri. S. R. Themozhiar in a discourse said God is not born as a human being does to a mother. He manifests when He wants. His will prevails and He is not answerable to anyone. He will not acquire the characteristics of man though He appears among them. He does not expect any return from men excepting their prayers. His supreme powers can be known by the way He makes even tiny insects (like tadpole) survive in the deep crevices of rocks. Thiruvalluvar indicates that God is indispensable and primordial cause like the first letter "A" of all languages, for the sustenance of all the animate and inanimate objects as well as the static and mobile ones of this universe.

April 16, 1991

Endurance, endeavour hallmarks of greatness 8.7

On some occasions, even those people, who have always been brimming with enthusiasm are found to become disheartened. Happiness and sorrow reflect the condition of the mind. But irrespective of the circumstances which instil hope in man or make him feel demoralised, there is always the need to maintain poise and face the situation with courage and confidence.

A person's wealth may dwindle and he may be left all alone with none to support, yet he should not lose the will to get back to his original status. Without willpower, determination

and zeal, he will be lethargic. With his efforts coupled with his faith in God, a person can certainly regain whatever that has slipped out of his hands.

Men of strong willed energy will never complain or lament over the loss of wealth knowing that ownership of property is always shortlived. There are still many who in spite of being deprived of their riches or position boldly say "Nothing is lost". Such men should be admired. Good fortune is sure to seek and enter the home of one who is tireless in exerting his will. Dealing with the trait of possession of grim determination, Thirukkural points out that energy pertains to one's physical body, while power of will belongs to the mind. Success is due to zeal. A man who constantly tries is sure to be elevated and instances reveal that virtue lies in the struggle not in the prize. Hence elders and teachers should see that the young do not become dejected when they have not reached their goal.

Explaining Thiruvalluvar's couplet on this subject, Sri S.R. Themozhiar said, often demoralisation results in downfall. A man's merit is the measure of his mental strength. His merit should be lofty. Even as the length of the lotus stalks depends on the depth of the pure water, the greatness of men rests on their endurance. Although shattered, men of determination will never yield or quail even as elephants are firm-footed when arrows hit them. Never will they throw the blame on others for their own failures. Even devotees who may suffer temporary setbacks in the progress of their religious exercises should not feel discouraged. Mental courage is manliness; without it, a person is only a piece of wood.

August 13, 1991

Morals are not subject to alterations 8.8

A person's sincere efforts in carrying out a task coupled with the grace of God will bear fruit. Those who strive with tireless zeal can even meet their adverse fate and force them to beat a retreat. That is why people are asked never to lose heart or feel frustrated saying "This is hard to do". Working hard will bring them rich reward.

The Tamil classic, Thirukkural, was written about 2000 years ago but the statements in couplets, concerning a person's activities are relevant even today. They cannot be rejected because they were contributed when circumstances were entirely different. There may be certain apparently contradictory views but experts have given their commentaries clarifying all inconsistencies. Morals can never be subjected to alterations.

The author says every one should have a goal and to achieve it, he or she should put in all his or her efforts. He should not be half-hearted or spasmodic in his attempts. Never should a work that is undertaken with a purpose be abandoned. Such ceaseless endeavour is needed in all spheres. Never should a person be bewildered when problems appear during the implementation of his scheme. He should continue to strive hard when God is sure to extend His help.

On certain occasions, even extreme sacrifice may be required by a person to get his dream fulfilled. In that case, those around him are bound to help him to complete the job. Schemes connected with social welfare will be supported by the public. Self-confidence is required in an abundant measure. A question may be asked why should we encourage a beggar by giving him alms and will it not promote laziness'. On the other hand in deserving cases this may goad him to work and desist from his habit and toil to come up on life. Sri. S.R. Themozhiar in his discourse said there should be no let up in one's

endeavour whatever be the nature of the goal. Never should God be cursed. Industry will always promote prosperity and Goddess of Wealth will knock at his doors. Indolence brings misery. Ill-luck resides with the lazy. Misfortune can never be considered a blot; on the other hand, a person should always be optimistic. Great deeds can be performed by perseverance if not by strength.

September 17, 1991

Detachment is to burn desire 8.9

Among the several doubts lurking in those who are sincere in upholding various spiritual exercises to realise God, one is about the proper interpretation of the term "Detachment". All holy texts, plead with aspirants to remain unattached towards worldly objects and activities; should that necessarily mean retiring to seclusion, cutting themselves away from the earthly influences. Not at all. All can continue their daily duties and still be detached. What is meant by renunciation is to abjure desire of any sort. Is this possible for an ordinary human being, who is constantly being pulled in different directions?

The significance of the statement is that to all living beings, at all times, vital desire is the inevitable seed from which endless series of rebirths sprout. If at all a person wants to aspire, he should display eagerness to be conferred with the rare privilege of being severed from rebirths. Freedom from births can come only by desirelessness, which can be treated as man's supreme wealth. It is unequalled here and in the beyond too.

Rooting out desires means to avoid harbouring them as they breed grief or weakness for the false and illusory objects of the world. Contentment is natural wealth, it should be possible for aspirants not to be greedy nor show eagerness to acquire what others may possess which he himself has been denied. Those who have discarded desires may be seen living like a drop of water on a lily leaf. A person can continue to be active in this world but he should take care not to become worldly. Desire is no doubt unsatiable. It needs very great efforts to curb this obstinate tendency.

Explaining the chapter dealing with the way to burn desires categorising it as an ascetic virtue by Saint Thiruvalluvar in Thirukkural, Sri S.R. Themozhiar said, an anchorite differs from an ordinary man in that he keeps his wants at the minimum. As one having no desire to possess anything, an ascetic's mind is pure. The "desire-free" are liberated; the rest may be caught in bondages as a result of craving. The damage a man may suffer due to hankerings is likened to the way in which a tank brimming with water which however has a small crack. Gradually it will widen and cause a threat to the reservoir. When there is no desire, there will not be a taint of sorrow.

November 25, 1991

Wealth must be used for others also 8.10

Almost all books of sacred literature warn us about the impermanence of wealth, saying that it may vanish as quickly as it was earned and that it should be utilised to do good to others. Should this be taken to mean that we should throw it away even when it is thrust in our hands or that we should not provide for our own wants? Far from such misleading

interpretations, what is urged upon us and what is implied is that it should be spent on removing the grief of people. So long as a person apportions his money for the benefit of the needy, it will continue to flow; the moment he stops giving, funds may also cease to be in his hands.

Realisation of the truth about the ephemerality of wealth will make a person give up his bonds says Saint Thiruvalluvar in his "Thirukkural" which is a scriptural work that enables a man to rise to the level of the Divine. The worst folly of man is to consider fleeting objects as lasting ones. Acquisition of knowledge about the transience of everything is real wealth. Even as the actors in a folk drama enter the stage one by one, get together ultimately and in the end withdraw behind the stage, money may come to be possessed by a person step by step but when it gets accumulated and is held in tight fists, it is likely to vanish.

Sri, S.R. Themozhiar in a lecture referred to the tendency among some not to spend the money they have amassed on even their own requirements or see that others around them and close to them derive benefit out of it. They will later regret it just as someone would when his sweets, which he neither tastes nor allows others to eat, are carried away by ants.

It is good to remember that charity should be extended to the deserving before one's life comes to an end because passage of time files, gnaws and cuts our life, bit by bit. If a handful of grain is taken away daily, the stock in even a full bran will be depleted one day. Man is not sure of his next moment but still he thinks of achieving many things. The scythe of time mows down and the clock beats away the lives of men.

December 16, 1991

Moral code as defined by Valluvar 8.11

Thirukkural, a monumental Tamil work, with great moral truths embedded in each one of its 1,330 couplets with aphoristic brevity and felicity of expression is considered a repertory of universal thoughts. It gives the light of right life, the wealth of practical wisdom, the milk of hearts abundance, the joy of peace and harmony at home as well in the wider homeland. The whole human aspiration is epitomised in the immortal book.

The author Thiruvalluvar has prescribed the moral standard which every man should follow, if society is to progress on sound lines. Saint Thiruvalluvar was a Sanskrit scholar and has interspersed many a Vedic idea in this work. Due to the perfection of form, profundity of thoughts, nobleness of sentiments and earnestness of moral purpose, it is called the Tamil Vedas Valluvar seeks to raise and sublimate the ordinary individual into a virtuous person.

In a lecture, Pandit V. Natesan said, the poet has divided the classic into three main parts, dealing with virtue, with wealth and with love. Virtue confers contentment and it alone finds eternal fame. God will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish. Valluvar's first directive is for a man to possess a spotlessly pure heart. Between God and a goodman, there exists a close friendship brought about by virtue. Thoughts, words and deeds, free from envy, greed, anger, lust and malice constitute virtue. Since domestic virtue envisages a life which has to be lived according to the rules laid down on that behalf and with the help and cooperation of one's chaste help-mate (wife), the author has started with its analytical study. "Do good deeds, ceaselessly, wherever and as much as you can; lack of virtue entails pain and degradation."

On the duties of a wife, he says that every house, where love abides, and friendship is a guest, is surely a sweet home. A happy family is but an earlier heaven. "Woman is key to the salvation of a family as she carries its destiny in the folds of her mantle," a couplet says.

January 17, 1992

How meat blunts finer feelings 8.12

The food that a person consumes has direct bearing on his behaviour and outlook. The articles which can be consumed and those which ought to be prohibited have been prescribed. centuries ago, by Saint Thiruvalluvar who had categorically laid down in his famed code Thirukkural that taking liquor and eating meat should be totally avoided.

To illustrate how eating of flesh of other animals to fatten oneself is sinful, he has devoted one full chapter. The meat-eater, he says in his opening couplet, cannot possess a melting heart in which compassion can dwell. Meat-eating is inconsistent with tenderness to life. These people may not know what mercy is. Meat consumption cannot be explained away on the grounds it cures certain diseases and should be taken in small quantities. Like the heart of a sword-wielder which will be made of steel, the heart of one who tastes the flesh of animals will be hard to goodness. By not eating meat, a life will be saved. The doors of hell will be kept ajar to those who consume it, the Saint says. It is an act which is at once the cause and consequence of butchery of living beings and hence is not becoming of a man of compassion.

Sri. S.R. Themozhiar in a lecture said it is wrong to presume that eating the flesh of animals provides physical

strength. Not only is it harmful as it will only result in corpulence but may kindle the baser instincts. Vegetarians are not weak and they can face any situation. A few may argue: 'Some one butchers; I only purchase and what is wrong. If people decide not to eat meat, no one will make a trade or a profession of slaughtering living creatures. Even if it is bought from a shop and consumed at home, it is a sin. As one who abets a crime also gets punished, one who buys meat, making somebody else kill an animal, will be considered a greater sinner. What is meat but a cruel and ugly ulcer in the body of another creature? How can one, who realises this, can make it an article of food? Refrain from causing death to any form of life, even should it be to save your own life commands the Saint. Some refer to the animal sacrifice in Vedic rites. Only those who wrongly interpret the Divine utterances, will resort to this. Rice alone is to be offered in the flames and imperfections due to the bad influence of the Senses are asked to be sacrificed.

February 24, 1992

Steps towards detachment 8.13

Affection and attachment are distinctly different, the former fetches happiness while the latter results in grief. 'Give up attachment' says all moral guidebooks. This is easier said than done because to renounce desire means discarding the extraordinary affinity towards outward objects such as wealth and inward objects such as the body, realising them to be impermanent. The fewer our wants, the nearer we will be to God. Attachment there can be, but entirely towards God.

Can these teachings be relevant today and that too for householder? Answering this, Sri. S.R. Themozhiar explaining

the verse in Thirukkural said, detachment can be cultivated by all, here and now. There are many who even in their post-retirement period and after having discharged all their obligations, cling on to material. Not that they are asked to seek seclusion but they can certainly reject pleasures, abjure desires and divert their entire attention to God. The greater the eagerness to get the needs satisfied, the more will be the involvement. The most vital lesson to be drawn is that not one object will follow him on his death.

The life of Pattinathar reminds us how he threw away his possessions just in a second. To the king who enquired him of the benefit he had derived out of this transformation the saint said: 'Hitherto I used to cringe before you but now you stand before me'. Similarly, Ramalinga Swamigal during a nap felt that one of his earrings was being removed by a thief. The Saint, pretending to be unaware, turned to the other side, enabling the culprit to take the ornament on the other ear too.

Some hesitate to hand over the family responsibilities to their wards on the presumption that the latter are not mature and alert to take care of the property. The very first step towards detachment is the control of food habits. This should be followed by curbing sensual desires and subduing cravings. Next is the stage when he should totally eschew the feeling that his efforts alone were responsible for his success. The egotism of 'I' and 'Mine' should go. "Renounce everything if you want liberation, says poet Valluvar. Rebirth is cut off when bonds are off. Attachment being a source of pain, every renouncement is a step towards true happiness. It need not be done all at one time. Renunciation will make God visit us.

May 18, 1992

Sins of the tongue should be avoided 8.14

Every human being desires to be free from grief. Its impact will be felt at some stage or the other. Hence, the only anxiety for the person is how to avoid it or mitigate it when it strikes. As he or she has been provided with the power of thinking, it may be possible to avoid indulging in deeds which cause it. A person should judge and know how to avert and by what means he can escape the consequences.

In his journey of life, man should seek the help of a ship to cross the ocean of existence. He gets into the vessel hoping to reach the shore safely. While he has no other option but to take to the boat, a bird, full of pride, decides that it can, with its wings, dart across the sea and travels side by side with the vessel. But in midsea, its wings lose the strength, and it cannot proceed any further and sits on the ship's mask. Likewise, wise people entrust themselves at the very early days to God, obey His commands and are given a berth in His ship. Some, like the crow, out of ego, try to show their strength and finally, without any other go, seek refuge in Him. With devotion to God and faith pinned on Him, it is possible to face any situation in life without getting demoralised.

God has prescribed how one should conduct oneself without getting involved in worldly affairs. One of them refers to the use of the gift of the gab. Apart from speaking good, a person should refrain from idle talk and gossip about others behaviour. Saint Thiruvalluvar in his Thirukkural, on the subject of 'Virtue' has devoted one chapter on worthless talk.

Sri. S.R. Themozhiar in a lecture said that to get entry into the ship kept ready for sincere men, the guidance of qualified religious leaders in necessary. They will ask you not to indulge in purposeless speeches and particularly avoid

tendering advice that will land others in problems. Tale bearing, falsehood, harsh and profitless words are the sins of the tongue. The advice given to others, if at all necessary, should be sound and should result in benefits to them.

Great care is needed not to be hasty in one's comments because celestials moving around, particularly in temples, are always ready to say 'Let it happen'. Hence one's advice should be good only. Where necessary, a person should extend sane advice. It will be used later by him like a seed sprouting only after some time. Even the reputation of one's family will be affected if one utters despicable words. By one's advice, confusion in others should be cleared.

May 3, 1993

God has no likes or dislikes 8.15

God has provided men with opportunities to rise to a Divine level. He has endowed them with the faculty of thinking and discrimination. The path laid is smooth and they can experience bliss traversing this. At the same time, the Almighty has also opened another road full of thorns leading to an abyss. The choice among the two paths is entirely that of the man concerned. God being impartial, with no likes or dislikes, remains as an observer. He will not like anyone to resort to bad deeds.

The wise, using their intellect, take to righteous means and help others to come to their fold. But the ignorant, out of conceit, with neither the capacity to act properly nor listen to sane advice, falter, face problems and get ruined. Thus their troubles commence. When they suffer, they may even

curse God. Those who have no attachment, who are Godly, will have purity of the mind and clarity of thought. The author of Thirukkural has brought out the essence of Virtue in the monastic type of life in a rational manner. The poet has explained what 'penance' stands for. It is fortitude with which the pain that falls to their lot is borne and in the avoidance of causing injury to sentient beings.

What type of penance will be relevant today? If austerities like fasting, exposing oneself to the Sun, and immersing oneself in deep water, all acts which go to display endurance, are to be reckoned as penance now, the beasts in the forest experience these hardships and they cannot be termed as conducting these feats. Real penance in the present context means to carry out the Do's and Donts' enumerated in the charter of duties. What is prescribed to enable a man to face challenges and to restrain the mind ought to be adhered to. Worship in temples shedding tears of regret before the idols, taking to other types of Godly activities and service to others all distinguish the wise man. The others chase pleasures which give purely temporary joy and that too for a brief time. The pious souls will admire a girl's charm considering her distinctions as God's gift whereas the crooked men will entertain base instincts, Pandit V. Natesan said.

June 14, 1993

Prayers help one to surmount problems 8.16

Scriptures say that the pain a person suffers, is his own making. Man is asked not to commit misdeeds or violate the

code of conduct. If he does so, he has to face the consequences. Why then should he indulge in wrong acts and regret later?

Some blame others for their own grief. Should a person consume certain prohibited items of food, he will surely develop ulcer or colic pain. Can he accuse the host? Any sane man who realises that his bad acts will recoil on him and that he will have to suffer the consequences will bear the agony with patience, should he be punished, as he knows the cause. Hence, the scriptures urge us to tread the path of virtue only and reap the rewards. Towards this, the guide books ask people to remember the Almighty in whatever station they may be kept, follow the rules of righteousness, worship God, carry out the sacred commands, observe discipline and lead a religious life. There may be obstacles but they should never deter them from pursuing the path - Divine. These problems can be surmounted through prayers. A few may adopt these procedures to please others or as a temporary measure or to display their prosperity. But they will revert to bad ways after some time.

In this connection, a story is told of a person who tamed a parrot to utter sweet words. But on one occasion when the bird was about to be grabbed by a cat, it could not repeat the words taught but just made a few cacophonic sounds. Hypocrisy will have no place in religious field. One should be constantly attached to God and engage oneself in continuous service to Him. Dealing with the relevance of penance as explained by Saint Thiruvalluvar in Thirukkural, Sri S.R. Themozhiar in a lecture said one should do one's duty with devotion and obey the Divine dictates to receive God's grace. No one should bargain with Him and expect immediate returns for one's religious duties. God knows the needs of devotees and the time when He should confer His benefactions on them. Even to animals compassion should be shown. Avarice should be avoided as otherwise one will be dismayed like

the person who was granted the boon that whatever is touched by him should turn into gold. This person ultimately regretted that he could not even take food with his hands and desired to get back his old life. Penance consists in the fortitude with which the pain that falls to one's lot is borne.

June 28, 1993

Thirukkural glorifies non-killing as virtue 8.17

While concern is shown by almost all at the killing of a human being, people are oblivious or silent over the butchering of enormous number of animals daily. There is absolutely no concern against the wiping out of these innocent beings because they cannot protest. If one should ask "what is virtue", the reply will be "It is non-killing". Again, if a question is raised as to "what is the path of goodness". The answer will be "It is to avoid killing any creature, anywhere, on any account".

Next to this unique trait is placed the quality of not uttering any falsehood. Not only should a person avoid killing another human being or a cow or a hen or even an insect, emphasis is also laid on the proper care of the tree or a plant too. Even allowing a plant to wither by not watering it when it is not in bloom or when it has exhausted yielding flowers, will amount to taking away its life. The essence of moral codes is to share one's bread with all beings and protect them.

The repertory of universal thoughts and truths, "Thirukkural" written thousands of years ago by Saint Valluvar glorifies

non-killing as a virtue par-excellence and beyond compare and describes it in superlative epithets, the virtue to be assigned next place to truthfulness. Interpreting his couplets, Sri S.R. Themozhiar in a lecture said felling of a huge tree or leaving an old man in isolation in homes-for-the-aged could also amount to killing.

The Saint's description of "Non-killing" clearly lays down that a person should refrain from this heinous act even when his own life is to perish. For instance, he may suffer from a disease that may require a medicinal preparation made by taking the life of a bird such as a fowl or a dove. By so doing, it will be criminal on his part to survive. On the other hand, he should prefer to die without taking such a medicine. Even if a preparation envisages the uprooting of a herbal plant to save a life, the harm to it should be avoided. At best, the leaves can be plucked but not the whole plant.

Likewise, there may be great gain in performing a sacrifice to propitiate God but to derive earthly or heavenly joy by killing an animal or a bird is to be considered the worst vice. There is no difference between a man gifted with wisdom and an animal which has no intellect, to sacrifice another life for personal benefit.

August 2, 1993

Release from ego brings peace 8.18

Problems which a person faces may invariably be found to emanate from frustration owing to the non-fulfilment of his desires. He may be pining to own some precious article which another luckily possesses. When it is denied, he feels

sad. When scriptural texts plead with mankind to root out desires, they mean that weakness for the false and illusory objects of the world should be avoided. Since one lives in this world physically, if by chance one's desires are to be kindled towards those very objects already renounced and forgotten, that will again constitute a cause for future births. It is a great blessing to possess what one wishes but greater still is not to desire what one does not. Attachment for the Divine goes with corresponding detachment from the lower objects.

In all human endeavour, detachment is recognised as a great and necessary virtue. Mere external renunciation is not enough, says Saint Thiruvalluvar in his Thirukkural, laying emphasis on the abandonment of desires. "Dread and guard against them. They are deceivers. They cause pain and when kept out, they will enable persons to experience unbroken happiness in this life itself". He describes desire as the seed from which sprouts unending cycle of re-births. If anyone longs for anything, it should be a prayer for not being born again. Purity of mind results from absence of desire.

In a lecture, Sri S.R. Themozhiar said when insatiable longings are given up one would be conferring on one's life, eternity. The Saint, in one of his couplets points out that desire-free people are liberated while the rest are caught in bondage as a result of cravings. Being insatiable and obstinate, desires should be eschewed entirely. But is it so easy to cut off desires? Only by practice, the capacity to remain contented with what God has gifted, can be cultivated. Scriptures suggest a person's close association with men who have renounced the liking for pleasures and whose minds are ever filled with noble thoughts. Those who shake off the yoke of egoism have no desire for anything, will be indifferent to mundane affinities, lead humble and passionless live and hence attain everlasting

peace. Moving with them closely others too are sure to avoid chasing vanishing objects.

November 1, 1993

Moral purity makes a person exalted 8.19

Moral purity is chiefly responsible for making a person exalted. A well-regulated life is of utmost importance: while birth as a human being is a rare privilege, it is essential for one to toil hard and earn his livelihood.

Saint Thiruvalluvar goes to the extent of saying that disciplined men will be kind and compassionate even to unlettered people. He categorises the really "poor" as those who in spite of their academic achievements and study of philosophy do not translate them into action. Not only may they fail to follow the lessons learnt through their study, they may also misguide others.

There is a direct link between one's learning and culture and behaviour. If a child is found to be humble, giving respect to elders and behaving courteously towards other, it can definitely be inferred that its parents observe moral codes and that its qualities were inherited from them. That is why holy texts lay emphasis on entertaining only the noble thoughts and uttering only truth and soft words.

Saint Thiruvalluvar in his Thirukkural, dwelling on the topic of "Learning" insists on people faultlessly pursuing knowledge and abiding by it. Real knowledge translated into action becomes culture and ethics. Traditionally, society has

been divided into various sections. If in the last category, there are people who are exceptionally learned and who maintain their character, they deserve all respect. How to identify such men - by their patience and tolerance. They will not mind insults or innuendoes. They will maintain their balance of mind, said Sri S.R.Themozhiar in a lecture. Avvaiyar in an aphorism points out how sound education in early days will make children display humility and show reverence to others. The bottom of a vessel with oil will contain a layer of soot and sediments; these can be removed only by burning them. Similarly bad thoughts which cannot be easily erased can be got rid of only by sound spiritual education, which pinpoints the need to seek Divine grace. Only properly educated men are said to possess eyes. In others, they can at best be described as mere sores or openings, adds the Saint.

November 15, 1993

Purity of mind is righteousness 8.20

There is no greater wealth and higher good than acquiring the power to remain virtuous all times. There is no misfortune worse than forgetting to abide by the rules of Righteousness. When a person unfailingly upholds the Code of moral and spiritual conduct, virtue will flourish. Consequently, sins will wane and ignorance vanish, leading to his developing a dislike, for worldly pleasures. He will thirst for release from bondage. All religions emphasise that man should never swerve from Righteousness.

An adage says virtue makes men on the earth famous, in their graves, illustrious, and in the heaven, immortal. "Do all the good you can, by all means at your command,in all

ways, in all places, on all occasions and as long as possible''adds another statement. Scriptures point out that the Lord, deeply concerned when this goal was forgotten and when evil became rampant, appeared in the world to protect those who zealously followed the rules of ethical conduct.

Thirukkural with 1330 couplets, written by Saint Thiruvalluvar, commences with an appeal to mankind to follow the Righteous way of life. Of the three holy works by which Tamil language has been universalised and immortalised. Thirukkural is considered the life. Thiruvachakam the heart and Thirumandiram the soul of our culture.

Thiruvalluvar diagnoses the intricacies of human nature. His prescription for a pious and noble life, leavened by godlines, ethics, morality and humanness is practical. His approach helps a person, who is imperfect but who wants to reform himself, take the hints given therein as they are easy to adopt. The couplets when annotated present the essence of the Vedic revelations and man's first obligation to do his duties with sincerity. The Saint goes on to say any amount of knowledge will be of no use if one is not devoted to the Lord, who resides in the lives of all creations. By fixing one's mind on God, one's problems can be erased.

For the contributor of these Divine couplets, the purity of the mind itself means Righteousness. To make it serene is the aim of religion, said Swami Vimalananda in a lecture. Free of all imprints of hatred, jealousy, desire and anger, men will start loving one another. Love is selflessness and a man who is prepared to sacrifice everything he has for a neighbour is indeed a man of love. The Law of life should be love, as it binds and builds. Love is the one unfailing factor which will support a man in his cause when all others

fail. Family life will become purposeful only if it is marked by Love. There is more penance in the life of a householder, who does what should be done and does not deviate from Righteousness, than in the privations of a hermit.

December 15, 1995

Adi Sankara's contribution to Hinduism 9.1

Even in days of yore, Hinduism was subjected to severe tests on account of attacks by other religions. As a result people, either lured by twisted interpretations or forced into conversion, strayed away from the path, laid with the Vedas as the base. But it has survived, in spite of shocks, because of its inherent strength and vitality. God has seen to it that whenever there was religious degeneration, a spiritual personality appeared amidst mankind to revitalise Hinduism and establish Dharma. Lord Siva Himself manifested as Adi Sankara to reinforce the decline in its belief.

With his commentaries on the Upanishads, the Brahmasutras and the Bhagavad Gita, Adi Sankara presented to the world, a vibrant philosophy, Adwaita, and thus nullified the effects of the propaganda by innumerable other creeds and counteracted their influence. Sri Mayavaram Sivarama Dikshitar in a discourse said besides the "Prasthanathraya" Adi Sankara had contributed hymns on deities ranging from Vinayaka to Anjaneya, enabling the people to derive benefit by their recitation. One among them is Sivananda Lahari, making the devotee constantly enjoy the bliss by the worship of Lord Siva. The concept of paying obeisance to the Lord and Parvathi together has been projected. To the present-day man, who faces crises at every stage and undergoes torment, meditation by recitation of his hymn would fetch peace, and his mind would be cleansed of the impurities.

April 16, 1980

The significance of Adi Sankara's works 9.2

The very complexion of certain glorious traditions, backed by religious sanctions, had undergone total transformation by efflux of time, resulting in their very purpose being defeated. One such is the custom of giving dowry. At present, parents of some bridegrooms extract money from the parents of the brides unmindful of the sacrifice the latter have to go through. The demand is often based on the qualification, status and personality of the groom. In olden day's the system was the reverse, the emphasis being that the married couple should remain happy throughout, Apart from the girl's accomplishments, charm and family background, what the elders were concerned about was her compatibility and her capacity to adapt herself to the new surroundings. It was the bridegroom's family which met the expenses for the marriage. This however, did not mean that the boy's parents were rich and that their offer was merely to display their prosperity.

The life history of Adi Sankara provides proof of the wisdom of our forbears. At the time of the marriage of his father Siva Guru with Aryamba, the former's parents insisted on bearing the expenditure on the bride, on the ceremony and on the jewels to adorn her. The Ramayana also illustrates this by the lavish sum spent by Dasaratha during Sri Rama's wedding celebrations. Sri Udayalur A. Rajagopala Sarma in his discourse referred to the outstanding hymn. Bhaja Govindam, composed by Adi Sankara. Pointing out the consequences flowing out of getting bogged in shortlived pleasures, he says a woman will hesitate even to touch the body of her husband, whom she loved most, when he dies.

The torchbearer of Vedic religion, a thinker, a reformer said missionary, Adi Sankara was also magnanimous as reflected

in accepting a flaw, pointed out by a Harijan. Seeing him .coming from the opposite direction, holding four dogs (he was Lord Vishwanath, with four Vedas), Sankara asked him to keep off, when the untouchable told him that his remark seemed to differ from his Adwaita philosophy. Did his command refer to the body or the soul? If so, was the Sun's reflection in the river Ganges and in the gutter water different? Sankara realised that he was in front of God and offered obeisance.

April 23, 1980

God steps in when Dharma wanes 9.3

It is Divine law that whenever there is utter social decadence and anarchy, God steps in to re-establish righteousness. About 13 centuries ago - it was an age of strife, it was a sorry state of affairs in all spheres when there was spiritual bankruptcy, when people began to forget Vedic teachings on account of the propaganda by inimical forces, when Hindu tenets were attacked and when as many as 72 sects raised their banners. It was then that Lord Siva incarnated as Adi Sankara, stemmed the crisis and restored Hinduism to its high position.

A philosopher who popularised Adwaita, visionary, teacher and reformer. Adi Sankara was a precocious child, even conducting Pooja for the family deity substituting his father when the latter was taken ill. By his devotional appeal, he made God and the Divine Mother reveal their presence and partake the milk he offered. While on his daily rounds for "Biksha", he noticed the sincerity of a woman who, unable to provide him food, offered the only berry she had, that too dried. In turn, Sankara recited 21 verses invoking the mercy of

the Divine Mother (called Kanakadara Stotram) and caused a shower of golden coins to help the humble benefactor.

In a discourse Sri S. Venkatesa Sastrigal said while Lord Siva took the role of Sankara at the request of celestials. He suggested that Subramania appear as Kumarila Bhatta to propagate Mimamsa, Brahma as Mandana Misra and Narayana as Padmapada. According to Anandagiri, Sankara constituted five pontifical seats. In his Soundarya Lahari, he calls himself a child of Dravidadesa (Dravida Sisu).

Sankara took to "sanyasa" while young toured extensively, prescribed an eclectic form of worship, and composed innumerable works - in prose and verse, all of which are marked by depth of devotion.

April 30, 1982

Chaos if man is not disciplined 9.4

Sceptics often raise a doubt whether religion and philosophy are necessary for man. They feel that the discipline that accompanies the religious rites borders on regimentation. Another view is that while seeking to control or check the activities of a person, religion virtually instills a fear psychosis in him. These and several other queries have been answered by the Vedas. The spiritual guides or Acharyas deputed by God to live amidst humanity, will be in a position to explain the need for prayer, worship, meditation and rites. They alone are in a position to remove the ignorance of man and impart knowledge to him to help realise God and obtain Salvation.

God who has created birds, beasts and human beings, has endowed only the last category with the faculty of thinking.

Animals and birds never complain to anyone about hunger they do not store food for the rainly day and are not concerned about privacy. On the other hand, man observes restraint and is bound by certain norms. He voluntarily agrees to abide by the Codes of Conduct evolved over years and refrains from doing certain acts openly. Thus he is placed on a higher plane of living and unless he subjects himself to this discipline, there will be chaos and mutual recrimination. Man is born to follow the rules of righteousness as his aim in life should be to get rid of rebirths. The procedure prescribed in Hinduism is simple, without even an iota of dogmatism or zealotry or compulsion. If a man abides by the injunctions, he will get elevated. Otherwise, he will continue to operate within the cycle of births and deaths.

In a discourse at Sri Manjakkudi Rajagopala Sastrigal said that at a time when there was anarchy and Vedic scholars were insulted, an instrument of Divine appeared to revitalise religion and provide strength to the dejected. That was Sankara, who composed several hymns on different deities and propounded the Adwaita philosophy.

May 12, 1983

Grace of Divine Mother will remove fear of death 9.5

Misguided men usually try to exhibit their "cleverness" by asking the familiar questions - Have you faced God and can you show Him to me. The presence of God has been and will continue to be experienced by devout persons but the Bliss derived therefrom cannot be shared with others. Each one should go through the process and certainly God will then reveal Himself. Can the man who rides a four-

wheeler see the air which fills the tyres. He certainly knows that he cannot ride without this unseen power required to inflate them. However, a saint who accepted the challenge from a young man, transferred his spiritual powers to him to enable him to witness God within. The two were Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Vivekananda respectively who lived in recent times spreading God's message. The shock that electricity gives cannot be described but no one will dare experiment to know how it feels.

Though he had no institutional education, yet Ramakrishna's luminosity was proved by his worldly wisdom even while young and the moral strength in him came to light as he grew. While even sages were not able to conquer carnality. Ramakrishna never yielded to temptations and was never lured by wealth. He saw the spark of Divinity in every woman and devoted himself to the worship of the Divine Mother, propagating the cult of "Santham". A gold coin concealed under his bedspread to test his power of resistance, made him uncomfortable and as he traced it, he picked it on one hand, took a clod of earth on the other, treated both alike and threw them into a river.

In a discourse in Ramakrishna Math, Sri Kripanandavariar said the Saint had emphasised that the grace of the Divine Mother would remove the fear of death. According to him, one could have a hazy idea of the intense craving for God if one could imagine a concentration of the three types of attachments - a miser's fondness for his hoarded wealth, a chaste woman's love for her husband and a mother's affection for her only child.

January 31, 1986

Where there is no room for hatred 9.6

The conduct of men, particularly in respect of their religious fervour, has been divided into three categories. Some men who are absolutely unconcerned about the need to arrange their activities properly and in a disciplined manner are compared to pebbles in a well, which get dry the moment they are thrown on the surface. The second type of men are likened to dolls stuffed with cotton which when dipped in water get bloated and when dry, resume their original form. These men may assimilate scriptural knowledge when taught but may relapse into the humdrum life after a time. The third classification is like camphor which shoots into flames in the very presence of a lighted matchstick. Man should start the process of God realisation with self-introspection. This will lead him to develop desirelessness and detachment. With these two traits, he can face problems and get over them. He should conduct himself like a bee that collects honey very carefully from the lillies in the pond. The frog that remains in the water may not know the flowers usefulness or their fragrance.

Swami Ramakrishna has referred to the attitude that a man has to cultivate - treat a gold coin and a potsherd alike. Lure of the lucre or of lust should not disturb him. One who wants to reach the goal of salvation should not hate any religion. A person can reach the first floor of his house either by climbing the steps or by using rope or through an escalator. God too can be approached in different ways. Religion is like the cotton inside a pillow: only the covers are changed. Each can pursue his religion but God is one, this is the catholic outlook of Hinduism where there is no scope for hatred, according to Swami Ramakrishna, said Sri N. Giridhari Prasad in a discourse. The man who entrusts himself to God can go about his duties without any hindrance even as a temporary visitor to a city keeps his luggage in safe custody in a cloakroom before his sight-seeing trip. "Do

your duty sincerely but never presume that you have done it. Remember the unseen guidance of God'', were the words of the Saint.

June 24, 1987

When mind is tethered to the feet of God 9.7

Prayers are generally offered in the presence of God (images) seeking prosperity and happiness. God, the possessor of unlimited powers, can grant them easily, if He decides. He accedes to devotees pleas. Even those who may seem to be extremely well placed, will have their own problems, though they may not give expression to them. Why do not people obtain what they desire, despite their prayers? The only reason is that they are not able to control the mind, which, like a monkey, cannot remain quiet even for a trice. The only way to prevent the animal from its antics is to keep it tied with a rope. The mind too should be given the same treatment if it is not to go astray and this can be done by tethering it to the feet of God by the chain called ''Devotion''.

The savant, Sadasiva Brahmendra has said that man should get himself engagaed in some kind of activity but in the midst of his work, he should always remember God. He should not waste his time in praising mortals and should never forget God. His attention should always be pinned to the Almighty's feet. How to cultivate devotion has been spelt out by another scholar, Neelakanta Dikshitar. The worship offered to God should be proper. If done in a correct way, a devotee will experience bliss. When the mind is attached to God, naturally, there will be no inclination to indulge

in misdeeds. Bereft of devotion, the mind is apt to commit sins, not realising that the unseen power watches his acts, God seated within us, should be ever remembered by us. Devotion will surely keep the mind freed from base thoughts.

Sri Bharathi Thirtha Swamigal, Sringeri Sannidhanam, said in a discourse, God's gift to us - wisdom - should be put to proper use and if directed towards spiritual pursuits, the mind can be kept flushed of impurities. Some people ask whether there is scope for "Bhakthi" in Sankara's philosophy. No doubt, a person who has reached the highest stage of the spiritual evolution prescribed by Adi Sankara need not do anything. But those who are in the lower rungs and who are yet to go to the highest plane, ought to practise devotion. Sankara had composed so many hymns only for the sake of the latter type of people. Carrying out the religious duties will enable a person to be reborn in an atmosphere more conducive to pursue the spiritual path. By gradual progress, a devotee will be able to knock at the doors of heaven.

May 6, 1988

Faith of fearlessness and hope 9.8

Hinduism has been misunderstood vastly as a fatalistic faith. On the other hand, it emphasises on fearlessness, courage, confidence and hope. Saints and Divine messengers appeared in the world only to clear these wrong impressions. One of them, Swami Ramakrishna had preached the unity of Godhead, amity among various faiths and Divinity of men. Worship of God and service to humanity were the cornerstones of his teachings, which were further propagated by his disciple Swami Vivekananda.

The latter once declined to attend a function at which a girl from a house of ill fame was to dance. The danseuse sang a Surdas bhajan which said that when gutter water mingled with the river Ganga, the latter would not negate. Similarly, even if she happened to be a sinner, she had a place in God's dominion and she should not hence be a subject of hatred. Swami Vivekananda tendered his apology for his lapse. In his short span of existence, he lectured on the gospel of unity and university.

Sri N. Giridhari Prasad in a discourse said Swami Vivekananda's message could be summed up thus: Remain fearless under any situation (abhaya); refrain from injuring any life (ahimsa); give up worldly desires (asanga) and be ever in the state of bliss (ananda). He association with his spiritual master Ramakrishna was from 1881 to 1886. After the latter shuffled his mortal coils. Vivekananda toured India and abroad. He had many disciples. In 1893, he was called upon to address the Parliament of Religions in Chicago where he delineated the ancient nature and character of India and appealed to all nations of the world to follow the path of catholicity and tolerance.

While in India, a prince mocked at the saffron robes donned by him. Vivekananda's reply was that this tradition was like his riding a horse and he should not cast aspersions on pious men but treat all devotees of God with reverance. While travelling in a train, two foreigners castigated him as a ticketless traveller. Vivekananda said he could handle them both and throw them out of the window but he was a servant of God and not a beggar. The two regretted their haste. He lived for about 40 years preaching India's religious traditions.

January 3, 1989

Association with the pious eliminates ego 9.9

Getting rid of ego is the aim of all spiritual disciplines, in all religions. But the problem is how to achieve this. To be associated with men of piety and Godly souls and to remain in their presence is the easiest and the direct method of eliminating ego gradually. When we move intimately with eminent and distinguished persons, baser thoughts and instincts will be purged from our hearts which then automatically become open to the inflow of God's grace. Perfection comes only by association with the pious and Sri Ramakrishna is one of our guides who should be enshrined in our hearts.

Swami Bhuteshananda, President, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Belur, in a discourse said, spiritual life is something extremely precious. It cannot be attained merely through the study of scriptural texts, resorting to worship in shrines or listening to dissertations. There is nothing academic about spiritual life. It is highly practical. "Religion is realisation, Doctrines or dogmas, rituals or books, temples or forms are but secondary details, "Swami Vivekananda has said.

The great master, Swami Ramakrishna was not learned, in the conventional sense of the term. He had hardly attended school. He had not digested the sacred texts in extenso or in depth. But outstanding scholars used to sit at his feet to taste the honeyed sentiments which flowed from his lips. There was nothing but spirituality in the greater leader.

What made sri Ramakrishna attractive and spiritual were his sincerity and earnestness. He never took anything for granted. He wanted to see if God existed and could be attained. Towards this quest, he performed incredible "Sadhanas". Studying Ramakrishna's life, we are not only convinced about

the Reality of God but also are encouraged to emulate him. When we come into intimate contact with a righteous person, spintuality gets transmitted to us even without our being aware of it. Hence the need for cultivating association with real godly persons. Swami Ramakrishna and his disciples considered themselves as mere instruments in the hands of the Divine Mother and hence there was not even a trace of egoism in whatever they spoke or did.

December 21, 1989

Role of spiritual leaders 9.10

Whether God-believers beckon the Almighty or not, He is ever present among them and is ready to extend His help and provide them with succour. He is aware of their needs and so, does not expect or ask them to call Him at every stage. Why then should people offer prayers and worship Him, it is asked, If they do so, the impact or severity of their problems would be mitigated and thus become less. Difficulties are bound to be there for anyone but they will get solved or obliterated if devotees approach Him with their sincere pleas. They will derive the moral strength to face any ordeal.

It is in this connection that spiritual leaders help humanity by extending their guidance. They are the chosen representatives of the Almighty. They will explain to devotees about God and His traits, tell them about the purpose of prayers and inform them about the good that will result. After acquiring spiritual wisdom through intense study and practise of austerities and by chanting Mantras, they retain in them, enormous spiritual powers and hence are in a position to advise disciples who approach them. With his versatile

knowledge and accomplishments. Adi Sankara consolidated the Hindu religion. In the illustrious tradition that he had established, the Sringeri Math has been helping humanity to tread the noble path. One of the stalwarts among such preceptors is the Head of the Math, Sri Bharathi Thirtha Swami, known for his erudition, gentle words and noble qualities.

On his Vardhanti, Swami Omkarananda in a lecture said, the outstanding Acharyas have been entrusted with task of spreading God's message. Their utterances carry weight. More important than their sermons, is the way in which they lead their lives in an austere manner, demonstrating how people should conduct themselves. They advise us not to utter falsehood, not to injure other's sentiments, not to move with men of evil thoughts but follow the rules of virtue and get associated with noble souls. They prescribe us the Do's and the Don't in leading good life. If people do not listen to their valuable advice, they will be the losers because these mentors are living Gods who enable us to gain His vision. We should be grateful to God for having deputed such men of eminence to show us the path to salvation.

April 10, 1992

Adi Sankara's guidelines for right conduct 9.11

Charity that is extended willingly and with deep affection, possession of wisdom without even a tinge of arrogance, valour accompanied by patience, and wealth in the hands of those, who are liberal, are reckoned as the most precious traits that a man should display. They are as rare as obtaining the most valuable and legendary gem (called Chintamani).

What is to be regretted is the tendency of some rich men not to donate even for noble causes. The Goddess of Wealth will present Herself only to those who are prepared to toil hard and who tread the path of virtue.

Several guidelines to enable mankind to lead a dedicated life have been given in the form of answers to doubts raised by ardent aspirants by Adi Sankara in one of his greatest works - the Prasnothramalika. One of them says that a man can get over his grief if he remains courageous and has a partner who is dutiful and responsible. As many as 65 suggestions, covering all aspects of man's activities are there.

Explaining the contents of this work, Sri T.S.Balakrishna Sastrigal said, the really blind (though he may have eyes) is one who indulges in prohibited acts, the deaf who does not listen to sane advice and the dumb, one who fails to talk pleasantly on the right occasions. Man's prized possession is his character. A genuine friend is one who dissuades the other from resorting to sinful deeds.

The ephemeral worldly pleasures can be compared to robbers; a truly educated person should be in a position, to sift the good from the bad. Man's real enemy is his indolence and tendency not even to try to do a job. Problems will not confront a person who seeks the advice of the learned elders.

The Prasnotharamalika urges us to live amidst pious persons. Men should go after acquisition of knowledge, wealth, strength, fame and the fruits of virtuous acts. Never should a person utter lies or speak about others defects or wrongs. One of the doubts raised is about the important factor that should govern our activities. For this, Adi Sankara has referred to the need to carry out one's duties and associate oneself with only those of impeccable conduct. Borrowing should be abjured and a tarnished image is worse than death. Saintly

persons are those who will be ever contented and whose strength lies in God. A person who is a free from anger will not experience sorrow.

September 2, 1992

Learning without devotion is purposeless 9.12

Will sciences which a man has learnt, the voluminuous books he has read and the skills he has acquired stand by him when the call from 'death' knocks at his doors. The answer is 'no', and the only way to save oneself is to supplicate before Govinda at that hour. No one can argue with the God of Death with the aid of books he has mastered. Learning without devotion to God is purposeless. Adi Sankara, in his 'Bhaja Govindam', cautions against wasting life in mere learning without tuning the mind to God. Spiritual knowledge, deep devotion and detachment are necessary for reaching the goal.

Sacred lore points out that the heart cannot be purified unless desires and attachments are flushed out "Let your attachment be to God", "Attain release by developing detachment", "Devotion alone can restrain the senses" and "The innate enemies of man are egoism and greed" are the commandments. 'Bhaja Govindam' contains the essence of all the scriptural truths. 'Submit to Govinda' is the refrain. "Give up the insatiable quest for wealth, be wise and cultivate contentment and remain satisfied with the fruits of your own labour", the Acharya stresses. The greatest treasure springs from the control of desires and non-craving. The hymn next refers to the need to avoid lust. Coveting women will result in unbridled passion and the consequent loss of mental balance.

The joys of life are as unstable as drops of water that float on a lotus leaf, adds the Acharya. Whatever pleasure we attempt to obtain is mixed with pain. A God-centred person should know that life is always in the grip of anxiety, sorrow and disease. When he becomes old and infirm, those who have lavished their affection on him earlier will ignore him. They will cling to him only as long as he earns. The course of life is an enigma, said Swami Vimalananda explaining in a lecture, the contents of Bhaja Govindam which are applicable to all people. How to overcome the evils which face us? The company of pious and Godly persons, who have rid themselves of desires, will fetch calmness of mind and equanimity. The disappearance of life's troubles is certain upon the dawn of wisdom. Cares and anxieties will be cured and there will be an awareness to lead a pure life with belief in God.

September 9, 1992

Man has to discover the God within 9.13

"You are not sinners. To call you so is indeed the real sin. You are the children of immortal bliss. God is within you and discover that great being, resplendent like the Sun. There is no other way to total freedom". this was the clarion call that Swami Vivekananda gave 100 years ago, quoting the Upanishad. That message is still relevant. He always emphasised the need to develop physical, mental and spiritual strength as the solution for all our problems.

While science and technology have advanced marvellously and man has been able to conquer external nature to a great extent, fulfillment has not come to him because his internal nature is still between sixes and sevens. Organic progress

has been achieved from amoeba to man but further evolution has to be at the psycho-social level. Man is unique in that he is the only creature which has developed a sense of values. But the 'gene' is essentially selfish. The body-mind complex is not the be-all and end-all of existence.

Our ancient seers discovered that behind the finiteness of the body-mind, there shines the 'Infinite' soul, pure and ever-free. The Cosmic soul (Atma) is the absolute Reality and it is non-dual. The proof of our existence is consciousness which is always singular. 'Thou art that', thou being the truncated little ego of which we are aware and 'that' is the ultimate Reality which is indivisible and integral. Discovering and experiencing the essential identity of 'Thou and that' is realisation. It is not an intellectual appreciation but an indubitable, intuitive experience, which can come only when the animal instinct is destroyed to enable man to emerge.

Swami Ranganadananda said in a lecture that this was the practical Vedanta preached and lived by Swami Vivekananda, who had insisted that religion was not dogma but realisation. The realised person sees God in everyone and himself in all. His compassion was to all. He declared that service and renunication are India's ideals. "Intensify her in those channels and the rest will take care of itself".

Indians have inherited the highest philosophy but they practise the lowest ethics. The selfish 'gene' wants to appropriate everything to itself which is responsible for various horrible practices. If the individual comes to have a glimpse of the infinite bliss that the supreme can give, corruption will drop from him and he will be a benediction instead of being a curse to society.

March 24, 1993

Outcaste's poser to Adi Sankara 9.14

Rich spiritual experience may be witnessed even in a young age. It depends on the person's purity of the soul and will-power to direct his energy wisely. India had produced outstanding men but unlike many who had achieved distinction by conquering other countries, some had left their footprints on the spiritual path by conquering the minds of the people. One among them had gained worldly maturity even while young. "It is better to be a bright flame for a short period than be a smoke for a long time". says a verse, Physical age of a person does not matter. India is proud of one such young reformer, philosopher, teacher, mystic, thinker, visionary and missionary - Adi Sankara.

To his parents, option was given to have a child that will be the instrument of the Divine but live only for a few years or a child that will grow as an ordinary citizen living for ages. they preferred the former and Sankara was born. He lost his father when he was about four years and he attended on his mother with all affection.

When he was born, the religious life in the country was in a state of flux. There was greater attention on dry ritualism. Lord Siva manifested as Sankara (the year of his birth, according to scholars, differs) to counter the challenges, revive Hindu religion and to recondition the spiritual life based on the Vedic revelations. To Adi Sankara, "Truth" stood uppermost. He took to ascetic order when very young. He had Govindapada as his teacher who directed him to go to Varanasi and propagate 'Truth' which he had realised. Sankara once asked a person said to be an outcaste to move away from his path. 'Are you referring to my body-or soul' questioned the man. It was Lord Siva who had appeared in that form. The result was a fine hymn containing Sankara's belief. Sankara wrote

commentaries on Brahma Sutras, the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads.

Swami Tyagananda in a lecture said Sankara taught people that they should speak what they thought, and act according to what they spoke. Sankara had many disciples who enabled the rich tradition established by the master to continue. "Ignorance is our invisible accompanist and we must know how to conquer it", Sankara taught, explaining how to convert the former into knowledge. Sankara's writings are simple and clear. Sankara could not visit Bengal during his extensive tour but Swami Vivekananda appeared in his place after several years, Sankara's career in a life of 32 years is a marvel without a parallel.

April 28, 1993

Spiritual elevation through Dharma 9.15

Hinduism has given to the religious world a Sanskrit term for which an exact equivalent has not been found in any other language. (The nearest may be righteousness or virtue or moral law). This word 'Dharma' envisages the practical application of certain rules which regulate man's conduct and enables him spiritual elevation.

Religion and righteousness are inter-linked. The former, relates to individual while Dharma stands for the welfare of society as all religions ask men to speak truth, respect elders and avoid theft. If a person upholds virtue, in its turn it will protect him. Everyday, one must always do good. offer worship to God and revere one's parents and listen to their advice.

The Vedas form the foundation for the grand and glorious edifice of Hinduism. They direct the followers to obey the

mother, the father, the spiritual guide and the (needy) guest. The first teacher, Dakshinamurthy made people observe the codes. The next universal teacher and preacher was Lord Krishna who through His Bhagavad Gita has shown the way to live and conduct ourselves. Arjuna symbolised the confused human being and hence through him the Lord has taught all of us.

Then appeared Adi Sankara who was able to resuscitate Hinduism when it has being subjected to onslaughts. Philosophers praise the contents of his teachings. Subsequently illustrious teachers followed him and today we have Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi as one of the illustrious leaders. He had spread the message of Hinduism in several ways.

In the life of every God-minded person there should be a spiritual guide. The Guru, as he is called, will teach him how to realise God. Respect shown to him will lead a devotee on to the path of liberation. He will inculcate discipline and act as a torchbearer. The Kanchi Acharya has given advice to people to refrain from receiving dowry and avoid ostentatious living. Because of his presence, there has been a spiritual awakening among people, said Sri Jayendra Saraswathi in a discourse. There has been an awareness about the importance to be given to the Vedas. The Hindu Dharma has come to be established. The Vedic commands like doing good, respecting traditions and paying obeisance to God should be strictly carried out.

June 8, 1993

Saint who made people worship God 9.16

The basic features of all religions are almost identical, asking people to uphold truth, practise non-violence, treat

everyone alike, show compassion to every creation, to ever remain associated with pious people and to recite God's glory. No religion says that its followers should steal, murder others, utter falsehood, consume liquor or adopt heinous methods to achieve their goals. The procedures to be adopted to reach. God may vary, austerities may differ and the paths to tread may be many, but they all preach that God is one.

In this connection, people while worshipping have made God their children, or companions or parents or masters or brides. One of the greatest missionaries and visionaries of India who was able to disseminate spiritual knowledge by making people adopt the process of reciting God's names, worshipping idols and meditating, through simple language, was Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.

He was not a literate but was bestowed by God with extraordinary spiritual knowledge by which he was able to explain even great truths hidden in scriptures, with case as to be understood by common man. He treated Goddess as his mother 'consulted' Her at every stage and saw Her in every woman.

Ramakrishna's arrival in the world, was like God and His aides manifesting when there was moral degeneration with a view to re-establishing and re-vitalising religion and telling humanity to follow the rules of righteousness. He was able to wean away many who, under the influence of foreign administration, were turning to take to western tradition ignoring Indian heritage and entertaining a slavish mentality. Ramakrishna made people believe in the efficacy of prayer, of reposing faith in God and adoring God through the idols. He was himself a priest, said Sri Krishna Premi in a lecture.

The broad outlook of Hinduism is such that it allows freedom for devotees to observe the rules and regulations

prescribed by the systems they follow. Hence there should be no scope for hatred or jealousy. God will help those who stand by religious traditions and not to those who defy His commands. Ramakrishna demonstrated the results of having deep faith in the Almighty. He brought about a change in those who once decried the Hindus as old fashioned. Through his Ramakrishna Mission, he still guides humanity.

March 16, 1994

Vivekananda, beacon light to youth 9.17

A combination of physical strength, moral purity, mental discipline and thoughts of a higher plane will help a person to succeed in his life. The ideal before him, particularly for the youth, should be to develop these qualities and adhere to spiritual values. If one is keen on cultivating clean habits - think, speak and act according to the guidance given by spiritual leaders - there is bound to be peace and prosperity. If young men are able to work to achieve this goal of perfection, God's assistance will be made available to them through leaders who will take them on the right path. One of the masters whose life can be kept as a model Swami Vivekananda, a symbol of Indian culture.

People in their declining days may claim to have turned virtuous and pure but that will be of no relevance. The youth should claim that they have got trained themselves at the moral and mental levels so as to face challenges instead of yielding to the deteriorating tendencies. Vivekananda blossomed into a unique man by getting inspiration from his teacher Sri Ramakrishna who was also in search of a pupil to whom he could transmit his spiritual energy. Vivekananda believed in the impact of destiny but he never failed to put in his

tireless efforts while approaching a problem. The teachings in the Bhagavad Gita that a person should sincerely carry out his ordained duties is of great significance to the modern period in shaping its destiny.

Sri Sukhi Sivam in a lecture pointed out how the vision, outlook and attitude of a person widens when a spiritual leader or a saint directs his activities. Vivekananda became an outstanding personality through Ramakrishna's teachings. Doubt will be cleared by such eminent men. If clarifications are needed in the Valmiki Ramayana, wise men are to be approached. These leaders carry the torch handed over by their predecessors and pass it on to proper disciples. At times, trying to acquire spiritual knowledge by going through innumerable books may result in confused thoughts and it is better to follow the teachings of intellectuals. Vivekananda's mind was fully conditioned by absorbing the words of wisdom of his Guru. He developed the spiritual strength to withstand the forces which usually lure a man and thus stood like a beacon light. The present generation can avoid getting into ruts if they look to Vivekananda's life.

March 21, 1994

Man can rise to the level of Divinity 9.18

Happiness and grief are part of the lives of all creations of God. But man alone has the ability to escape from both permanently. He has the power of discrimination and he has been gifted with plenty of spiritual literature from which he can adopt the procedures and exercises of his choice to get rid of reappearances in the world. Cows and goats do not possess this faculty. For instance, when a stone is aimed at a dog, the animal will bark and bite the person concerned.

When a sweet is immediately offered to it by him it will come near him and show its gratitude. Man can certainly avoid getting involved in worldly activities. He should have a purpose and a goal in his life. He can shape himself properly and rise to the level of divinity.

The methods made available in sacred books include meditation on God and singing His praise. The Vedas give prime respect to a mother, not only because of the sacrifice she makes for her child's birth and growth, but also for her role in shaping its future. She deserves deep respect. Scriptures say that Goddess is the supreme mother, all men and women are her children. It is easy to meditate on Her dazzling form. Saints have adored Her qualities in hymns. Among them Adi Sankara occupies a very prominent place.

The works of holy men can be divided as those dwelling on the philosophic systems which they spread, commentaries, explanations of contradictory views and hymns extolling various Gods and Goddesses, packed with devotional content. Adi Sankara a Divine personality with a great mission and a world teacher, has rendered several hymns worshipping from Ganesha (Vinayaka) to Anjaneya. Some wonder how this exponent of non-dualist doctrine could sing in praise of a variety of deities. This has been duly explained by his successors that these compositions were devotion-oriented. He has glorified Rama as well as Subramania. But there will be none who has not heard about his popular "Bhaja Govindam".

Sri B. Sundar Kumar in a discourse detailed the significance of one of his outstanding poems "Soundarya Lahari" or tides of Divinity's beauty. This work as well as the 'Subramania Bhujangam' not only spell out the greatness of the Divine Mother and Lord Siva, but are interspersed with Mantras and hence those who render them will enjoy physical fitness and mental peace. There are different versions about its authorship that Sankara wrote nearly half and that the other portion

was taken away by Nandikeswara and that the former completed it. The other view is that he had himself contributed all its 100 verses. Mantras have to be learnt from expert guides and recited properly. Otherwise there may be contra-effects.

September 16, 1994

Submission to God ensures realisation 9.19

Will a passenger after boarding a train carry his luggage on his head? The wise will unload it and travel comfortably. Likewise, the man who remains devoted to God will not mind problems in his life as he knows that God who has created him will also take care of him. He has to entrust himself to the Almighty.

This was the gist of the message which a saint, who lived amidst us till about four decades ago, told those, who approached him for solace. He was simple and easily accessible, talked very few words, wrote little but asked all who came to him to ponder and find out "Who am I?" "Knowing the nature of the 'Self submit yourself to God". This Divine personality who lived in Tiruvannamalai, Ramana Maharshi, used to tell people who thirsted for peace.

At the age of 17, Venkatraman (as the saintly soul was known before renunciation) was seized by an inexplicable fear of death and went through an agonising experience for nearly a year till he realised that the 'I' is apart from and independent of the body and is pure consciousness. He was in that exalted state of sublimity and equipoise till shuffling his mortal frame in 1950. When his mother urged him to marry after seeing his attitude to life, he left a note that

the ordainer controlled the fate of the soul and that he was responding to the call of the Divine, the Lord residing in 'Arunachala' (Tiruvannamalai). His mother later became his devotee and he erected a shrine for her in his Ashram.

Sant Keshavdas in a lecture said, once an accomplished scholar sought to know from Ramana what constituted penance and how to attain peace of mind. He replied that when the attention of the mind was fixed on the source from where the mantras (sound) emanated, and the mind gets absorbed in that, it was called "tapas". The scholar then wrote a book on Sri Ramana's philosophy. The saint gave importance to Yoga and breath-control.

Several devotees, including some from foreign countries visited Bhagavan Ramana seeking enlightenment. Invariably, he asked them to answer the riddle "Who am I?. Standing before him was like gazing at an ocean with a list of thousand questions about its vastness, one of the foreign visitors said.

When a devotee told Ramana that the Bhagavad Gita was big, the sage gave its essence in 42 verses culled out from all the 18 chapters (700 verses) with an emphasis on the distinction between matter and spirit and that God witnessed all the activities of a person. Those who visualise with an eye of spiritual knowledge, will understand the difference between the body and the soul, and remain untainted.

January 24, 1995

God, immanent in His creation 9.20

All the evil traits like hatred towards one another, distrust and recrimination found among human beings will have no

place if people come to realise that God, whom they worship in a temple, the indwelling God in their hearts and He, who is immanent occupying the entire universe, are one and the same. When people understand that the Lord, who has taken a place deep within their hearts, remaining unseen in an atomic form, is also present in others, the tendency to suspect and quarrel with one an other will never arise.

How can one experience God's presence within one's heart? For this, man should not allow the various Senses to go astray or get deep rooted in worldly activities, but direct them towards controlling the mind, which when calm and free from distractions will enable him to witness the Almighty within every creation. If God is thus one, there will be no scope for indulging in suspicion and quarrel. The basic message of Adi Sankara's philosophy is the concept of oneness.

The world's first spiritual teacher was Lord Dakshinamoorthy, who spread knowledge, through his silence and by a mere gesture. The second preacher was Lord Krishna, who through His Bhagavad Gita spoke about man's duties. The third universal guide in the Kaliyuga was Adi Sankara, who through his teachings and writings propagated knowledge. His works include commentaries on the major scriptures, treatises like Vivekachoodamani and hymns like Ganesha Pancharatnam. Though they are intended for men of various levels, yet their import is on the one indwelling God.

Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Swami in a discourse, explained how the form of God worshipped as "Ananthapadmanabha" includes praise offered to both Vishnu and Siva. In his exposition on 'Vishnu Sahasranama', Adi Sankara while analysing the meaning of the term 'Vishnu', appeals to the Lord to make him shed his ego and grant him the quality of humility. "Enable me to turn the attention of my Senses towards You seated in the heart", adds the Acharya. Even now, those who swear,

place their hands on the chest indicating their belief that God is firmly seated in the heart.

Vishnu pervades the entire universe including the space between the world and the sky. Hence if people realise that He is everywhere, they will desist from displaying animosity towards fellow human beings. The term 'Narayana' has also been explained to mean that 'surrender' to Him is the way to see Him within and also everywhere. Adi Sankara pleads with God to give him the power to utter these glorious names and thereby reveal the right path to reach Him. "Let us follow his teachings, shed our pride and see God everywhere".

February 10, 1995

Mind, the root cause of man's desires 9.21

Devotion to God gives faith in a Supreme force which will guide one's activities properly and the conviction that there will always be justice. The Vedic revelations unequivocally declare that this Supreme Reality creates the world, sustains and destroys it. This triadic function of the Lord has been stated in the Taitriya Upanishad. Even a person who says he has no belief in God must have hailed from a family of devoted individuals. He may listen to all the valid proofs regarding the existence of God but yet may ultimately feel that there is no God. Better to pity such men and leave them alone.

Scriptures state that those who worship God and engage themselves in His service, will enjoy peace and prosperity. Lack of faith and failure to worship Him may be considered a sin and may tantamount to disobedience. Being kind to

others and helping them will fetch merits while injuring others and harming their progress are sinful acts.

Sri Bharathi Theertha Swami, Sringeri Acharya, in a discourse said man's sins arise mainly from the attitude of the mind, from the words he utters and the misdeeds committed by his body. Entertaining the very thought of appropriating an article which he does not have but which others are privileged to possess is a sin, Secondly, one should not covet other women but consider them as mothers. Never should one feel jealous on seeing others prosperous. If by chance, he comes across a valuable property accidentally, he should treat it as a mere potsherd or a clod of earth or a piece of useless stone. He should feel that it is God's decision that he should be granted only a limited extent of wealth and goods. "He who is content with whatever he gets without making efforts for it, is wise" states the Gita. Men should also eschew undue attachment to worldly objects. What they deserve, they will get and hence there is no purpose in regretting that they have been denied certain comforts which others may enjoy.

We should display our faith and devotion to the Supreme Lord in some form. There were dialecticians like Adi Sankara, righteous emperors like Rama, scholars like Appayya Dikshitar and Divine bards like Thyagaraja, Devotees can chant God's name, take to some kind of service, offer worship or meditate. Appayya Dikshitar adds that one may be an erudite scholar or composer or distinguished in some field but the grace of the Divine should fall on him. In his prayers to Vishnu, Adi Sankara refers to the purpose of His incarnations, viz to protect the virtuous and guide humanity and hence devotees should surrender themselves to Him, pinning their belief in His grace.

May 16, 1995

Shed disparities for spiritual progress 9.22

It is not possible to assimilate spiritual instruction for the attainment of God until the mind is cleansed of all the baser impurities and becomes child-like. Even if there is any trace of worldliness one cannot see God. Such a state of mind rid of all baser qualities, which is pure and spontaneous in its reactions like a child's is the mark of a man of God.

This is the reason great saints are like children in their demeanour. Children do not show disparities and discrimination in their behaviour and so there is no room for resentment, jealously and anger, in their minds. It is these negative qualities which create obstacles in the mind during spiritual practice.

Moreover these base instincts create a sense of disparity in our relationships with one another. For instance, when there is theft or violence perpetrated on us, we want the culprit to be punished but what happens when we or someone whom we hold dear commit the same mistake'' We do not react in the same way.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa used to relate an incident to help his devotees overcome the sense of disparity in their treatment and relationships said, Swami Yatatmananda in his lecture. Once in the Kali temple when the arm of the Radhakrishna idol was broken, since it was ordained that such an idol could not be worshipped, everyone wanted it to be thrown in the Ganga. But the saint pointed out that no one would discard someone dear to them if his arm got disfigured.

By applying the same logic to ourselves we should guard against letting one or the other of our faculties claim superiority over the other. Every faculty has a role to play in spiritual progress. Likewise, the paths of knowledge, action and devotion,

each has its own merit. Without knowledge, devotion might end as mere emotionalism or sentimentalism. So spiritual evolution is possible only when each faculty is trained to function and co-ordinate with one another.

This can be achieved only with constant vigilance of our mind while adopting any spiritual discipline. Spiritual seeking and thirst for liberation with constant self-questioning will lead us on the right path. Rid of disparities, the mind also becomes simple and child-like and it is only such a person who can get near God.

The Supreme Being is simple without complexities and the path to reach Him also is very simple if we understand it. We must only shed our own mental disparities and complexes and approach God with faith and love like a child. True spiritually must endow us with love for everyone and there is no room for hatred or violence in the name of religion.

May 26, 1995

Truth transcends dogmas 9.23

Of all the species on the earth, man is the only "animal" endowed with the power of reasoning. Hence human birth is a unique blessing. Man has used the discriminatory faculty to build civilisation which provides him with innumerable material comforts and luxuries. Yet he remains dissatisfied. He is unable to experience the peace that is his birthright. He finds that sensory pleasures are transient, as they invariably end in tension and frustration. He yearns for total freedom from misery. He seeks a state beyond the sensory plane. How is it to be obtained?

Scriptures say "Approach a realised soul and learn from him what Reality is". Sri Adi Sankara begins his mellifluous hymn 'Vivekachudamani' by stressing on three requisites for life's fulfillment - birth as a human being, eagerness for liberation and association with great souls. Hindu religion encourages questioning. Most faiths consist of dogmas which have to be blindly accepted by their followers. But dogmas collapse when challenged by reason. Truth is that which can stand any amount of questioning. Truth transcends dogmas, as it is objective reality and not subjective opinion.

Those students keen to realise Truth should not only be intelligent, but should possess four cardinal virtues - ability to distinguish the permanent from the short-lived, dispassion, control over the senses and intense anxiety to be liberated from worldly thraldom. The teacher who is to impart spiritual knowledge, in turn, should be well versed in scriptural authority, should have personal experience about God and be full of compassion for the distressed. The disciple ought to follow the teacher very closely.

In a lecture about the hymn (The crest jewel of discrimination) Vivekachudamani, Swami Ranganadananda said, when a teacher says that human bondage can be removed only when the 'Self' is realised, the disciple asks: "What is bondage, what is its nature, how is it caused, how can it be overcome and how to distinguish between 'Self' and 'non-self'. Pleased at his curiosity, the teacher replies that for most people, bondage is only political or economic. It requires a sensitive mind to feel that there are values and experiences beyond the sensory level. Misidentification of the non-self with the real Self is the cause of bondage. The former consists of five sheaths - the material layer (the gross body), the vital air, the mind, the intellect and the sheath of joy. All these are perishable. Only when they are brushed aside and transcended, does one come to the Self, which is luminuous, eternal, and undivided.

It is of the very nature of Bliss. The real 'Self' is veiled, while the unreal non-Self is projected. Sri Sankara calls this 'Maya', most marvellous and utterly indefinable.

September 12, 1995

Human life must be useful 9.24

Life of a human being will not be purposeful unless he takes steps to know the nature of his own Self. In his hymn, Manirathnamala, Adi Sankara has posed why man should allow himself to get immersed in the sea of rebirths. Should be not try to put a stop to the chain of births and deaths? He has himself answered the query by referring to the need to acquire true spiritual knowledge and find out how human life should be fruitful by adopting means to be rid of this worldly bondage.

On a hypothetical basis, even as Lord Krishna granted Divine vision to Arjuna and likewise Vyasa to Sanjaya (to report the events in the Kurukshetra war), let us imagine that a man is given a boon, by which he can recapitulate the crores of appearances he had made over several births and see the many varieties of lives he had taken. He might have been a flower in one birth and then dust, once a king and in the next a mendicant, he would have been born as a fisherman and also his catch (the fish), or evolved as a lion and also its prey.

Should he not then pray to God not to involve him again in this cycle of births and deaths? Will he not then attempt to understand the true Self? Sankara has pointed out that the Soul (Atma) is indestructible while the numerous bodies a man assumes or is yet to take, are perishable. The Bhagavatham

and Yagnavalkya's utterances, indicate the permanent nature of the body. Man's knowledge will also make him realise that there is no difference between a substance and its attribute or the whole and its part, and likewise of the individual soul and the whole from which it evolved. The yearning of man then will be to establish his relationship with God through prayers.

Sri Nischalananda Saraswathi of Govardhan Math, Puri Sankaracharya, in a discourse explained the above postulate through scientific evidence. If a garland is made of flowers and is thrown up, it falls down as substantiated by the theory of gravitation. This is because of the fact that the flowers came out of the earth which has smell too. Water falls from the sky to the ocean, as it originated from there. One may go to the top floor of a high-rise building in a lift but there too, when he opens a tap, the water flows down only. The space within a pot and outside is same. The flames always leap upwards because of the relationship with the Sun.

A householder should lead a life of virtue, his worldly activities to be carried out within the parametres of the Law of Morality. Adi Sankara has left a rich spiritual legacy and by upholding his teachings, life can be made joyful and sublime.

November 24, 1995

Attributes of a spiritual seeker 9.25

Spiritual discipline like any secular one requires certain qualifications in the aspirant. Many of the scripture are in the form of a dialogue between a teacher and a disciple. This method facilitates easy understanding of the subtle concepts, which are in the nature of answers to the questions of the

disciple. This way the curiosity of the student is sustained and an important idea conveyed through this method is that spiritual knowledge must be learnt from a Guru and never through self-study.

Tattvabodha of Adi Sankara is an introductory text to Vedanta outlining the fundamental concepts. At the outset he mentions the fourfold requirements of a spiritual aspirant. Discrimination between the eternal and the ephemeral, dispassion, discipline and intense desire for liberation, are the four qualifications of a spiritual seeker according to Vedanta, said Swami Paramarthananda in his lecture.

As long as there is dependence on an impermanent thing there is always a constant worry about losing it. Such a vacillating mind cannot have a positive and balanced approach to life in general. Discrimination (Viveka) in the context of spiritual discipline is the understanding of the distinction between what is permanent and impermanent. Except the Supreme principle (Brahmam) everything else is impermanent. This has to be clearly understood before embarking on any spiritual practice.

Dispassion is freedom from desire for material and heavenly enjoyments, which arise from the knowledge of the impermanence of material life. Here it is important to understand that the scriptures do not say that we should not enjoy worldly life. But they point out that they should be legitimate, moral and moderate, so that there is proper allocation of our time for serious pursuits.

Dispassion is a natural corollary of discrimination when the seeker realises the futility of pursuing material pleasures which are transient. So the right attitude is when there is neither attachment nor hatred towards worldly life and a feeling of neutrality is maintained in all pursuits.

Spiritual discipline involves six attributes in the seeker - control over the mind, control over the senses, tranquility, forbearance, faith and concentration. Control of the mind is the first step in spiritual life and so also the control of the Senses. Maintaining tranquility while performing one's duty in life and the forbearance to the vagaries of life is very essential. Total faith in the Guru and the scriptures are imperative for spiritual progress. Any venture requires concentration of mind and it is all the more essential while undertaking spiritual study. Finally there should be intense longing for liberation.

June 24, 1996

True joy is not found in material things 9.26

A human being is invariably inveigled by two impulses. He wants to find joy in the presence of the external objects of the world. He chases those material objects which he believes will fetch him all satisfaction. He desires to possess articles which others have acquired for themselves. But he does not realise that a comfortable life is not a happy life. No one can desire anything which is impossible to obtain. For instance, nothing will be more ridiculous for anyone than to ask God, in his prayers, to provide him with a second head. When a man finds that his wants are not fulfilled, he is seized with anxiety.

Receiving the hospitality of a villager, a saint permitted him to seek any favour. the former said, "I am in distress, remove it". The latter suggested to him to get just a piece of cloth from anyone who is 'really happy'. On his quest, the villager learnt that even the king of the land did not

enjoy peace because of the problems confronting the nation like the threat of invasion and outbreak of epidemics. Ultimately, directed by a saint, he found in a hut near a temple, a mendicant with no clothes on but spending his time in mirth. He told the villager that he was really happy and he had no clothes to wear or spare.

Thus joy does not arise out of the worldly objects. What may be considered good and liked by one may not provide joy for another. A mother may prepare a dish out of bitter gourd which one of her sons may relish while another son may dislike. A family was on picnic to spend the day merrily and its head ensured that the house was locked properly and held the key with him. On return, he could not find the key immediately but later saw it lying secure in the folds of his trousers. Actually, it was neither lost or found. He was ignorant but he was joyous, similar is the plight of all of us.

In a lecture, Swamini Shraddhanand Saraswathi referred to the three urges in man. He wants to live and abhors death. Secondly, he wants to live happily entertaining a notion that he is imperfect. Thirdly, he is keen on gaining knowledge as he presumes he is in need of it. An aspirant should develop the power of discrimination and find out his own true nature of discrimination and find out his own true nature by engaging himself in introspection and self-enquiry. This is what Ramana Maharishi has taught us. In his work "Upadesa Sarah", comprising 30 verses, he has compressed the contents of the sense of ancient wisdom, in a dialogue form (as in other scriptures like Kenopanishad) between the master and the disciple. The preliminary question raised is "Whether actions are of supreme importance" in obtaining liberation and the reply is "They cannot be".

July 3, 1996

Dedicate all actions to the Lord 9.27

The path of spirituality which is not easy to tread, can be compared to walking on a razor's edge. There may be conflicting views though they have been resolved by saintly men. For instance, aspirants are told about the purpose of rituals (actions), while there is also mention as how they may prove to be impediments.

God is the creator of the universe and this has been declared by Him in the Bhagavad Gita. In His capacity as the Supreme Being. He has to regulate the activities of mankind and hence has prescribed certain laws. Some believe in the efficacy of rituals and that they will yield results. If it is so, where than is the need for God? That His supremacy is unquestionable can be illustrated by the manner in which the arrogance of the Gods (celestials) was put down. Having defeated their rivals, these Gods were puffed with pride and attempted to display their power before the Supreme in an incorporeal form (Yaksha). The God of fire (Agni) was asked by the latter to burn a blade of grass which he could not. So too was the effort of the God of wind (Vayu) when he failed to move it even to a little extent. Ultimately, the chief of the celestials realised who tested them. It was the Supreme Lord.

By the ordinance of the Lord alone, results of actions are obtained. When a ritual is performed, it can yield only a specified result. Sri Ramana Maharishi in his work 'Upadesa Sarah' has explained that the performance of actions or rituals is the cause of further fall into the vast ocean of action and and hence is an obstruction to man's progress towards acquiring spiritual knowledge, which is the means to liberation. This is what Adi Sankara has pointed out in his Bhaja Govindam.

Does this mean that a person should give up all his actions? If they give joy, people will repeat them and if there

is sorrow, they may run away. Swamini Shraddhanand Saraswathi in a lecture said, actions were necessary but while carrying them out there should be no expectation or desire for their fruit. They ought to be done with dedication and with the spirit of surrender to the Lord, Performed thus, they will purify the mind and lead one of the goal.

The action or duties have been classified into five groups. Some of them are compulsory like worship and meditation. Some are to be done on specific occasions like ceremony for parents. Some are intended to fetch a particular mundane or religious benefit. The other one is in the nature of prohibited acts, like the avoidance of meat-eating, taking liquor or indulgence in cruel deeds towards others. The last is atonement to neutralise the consequence of improper acts. In all, the agency of the doership should be given up realising that an aspirant is but an instrument in His hands.

July 4, 1996

Entire universe, manifestation of God 9.28

There is no short cut to the path of spirituality. An aspirant should go through the procedures prescribed to reach the goal of liberation. These exercises include worship, reciting God's praise and meditating on the forms of God. Scriptural texts prescribe three modes of devotion. The ritualistic aspect is less efficacious than chanting which in turn is not as beneficial as meditation. The first method can be compared to riding on a tricycle with supports, involving physical action. The second, chanting, is like the bicycle requiring adequate balance. Meditation is akin to the use of a mono-cycle (one wheel only) requiring skill and is a mental action.

Why should a person worship many forms of God? From time immemorial, people of India have been adoring idols, which for them are not inert or mere stones. The forms of the Supreme Being are invoked and He is 'invited' to reside in them (through consecration and other rituals).

The Vedic literature states that worship of all forms ultimately reach this Supreme One, who pervades the entire universe. He resides in all creations and hence people revere cows and Tulasi leaves. Devotees see Him through the universe as He manifests in it, in eight forms or elements - ether, fire, wind, water, earth, the sun, the moon and the individual soul (a conscious being). This has been spelt out by Adi Sankara in his Dakshinamoorthi stotra.

That He alone is supreme, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and that everything originates from Him, is sustained by Him and goes back to Him has also been stated in the scriptural texts. Sri Ramana Maharishi in his Upadesa Sarah has said that serving the world with the attitude that it is but a manifestation of the Lord Himself, is His worship (in eight forms).

In a lecture, Swamini Shraddhanand Saraswathi cited the instance of Saint Namadev, who seeking a mentor went to the temple where he (the later) was spending his days. But he was bewildered, as the preceptor was lying with his legs stretched towards the deity (Linga) which was an act of sacrilege. Namdev kept his feet in other directions but everywhere the images were seen to sprout. Namadev realised the all pervasive nature of the Lord.

Ramana Maharishi's next verse refers to the loud singing of the Lord's glory as one of the modes of devotional exercises. Compared to this, repeating His names within the mind is better (in that order). A devotee can choose any mantra for

recitation. As regards meditation it is difficult to quieten the mind while concentrating on God's form, but steps should be taken to control it. A man who desires to take a bath in the sea cannot wait till the tides subside. He has to take the plunge.

July 5, 1996

Mind can be both a friend and a foe 9.29

The spiritual path is strewn with a plethora of difficulties. One vexing paradox is that the mind plays the dual role of being a friend and also an enemy. It will be a friend only after being gradually trained and will be a guide when an aspirant has sufficiently progressed in conducting religious exercises. Until then it should be regarded as troublesome and treacherous. It has been described as an arch-deceiver.

The mind has the knack of making the unwary aspirant mistake himself as its master, all the time fooling him. Its deceptions are very subtle. Like the devil quoting the scriptures, the mind can use a virtue to indulge in a vice. It can take the support of a good principle to justify the most unprincipled action. Guidelines have been given by men of wisdom to enable sincere persons to be cautious about its deceptions.

"Be resolute, stick to your principles, never budge an inch" is one advice rendered in this connection. The mind will make an aspirant believe that he is indeed sticking to a divine determination, thereby forcing him to cling to his ego. Hence he should discern the difference between pure steadfastness and sheer stubbornness. The second is to cultivate the feeling that all women are one's mother. The same type of precaution holds good for a woman in relation to man.

Thirdly, an overdose of humility may make life impossible amidst the diabolical elements. "You may hiss but not bite like the proverbial snake which resorting to piety for itself was manhandled by mischievous urchins", says Swami Sivananda. Explaining the contents of the message of this saint on the mind and its vagaries. Swami Vimalananda in a lecture referred to the instruction that one should always speak the truth. An unpleasant truth can better be left unsaid. Truth and non-injury should go together. Another suggestion is not to take dispassion and detachment lightly. they should be cultivated diligently and safeguarded carefully because contact with the objects of perception has caused the downfall of even mighty sages.

While practising austerities, one should not go to extremes. He should try to understand what is essential for his development. The idle nature of man loathes restraint and following a set line of conduct. Invariably, the very practice that is adopted by the aspirant to divinise his life may be converted into a prop and field for the play of the ego. The guidance of a teacher and prayer to Lord will illumine a person when he is plunged in ignorance. Humility and constant vigilance will earn the Lord's grace for one who shows his sincerity.

September 11, 1997

Narayana Guru's vision of human fraternity 9.30

Anyone who has gone through the stanzas of the ancient Saivaite scripture, the Thirumandiram, would be familiar with the profound saying of its author. Thirumoolar, that there is only one race and only one God. This statement came thousands of years ago but in recent times, a scholar and a Godly soul, who distilling the various old writings, spelt out an equally

stirring message - "One God, one religion and one caste" - for the humanity. This universal concept of life to realise the supreme nature of the Absolute (God) was prescribed by Sri Narayana Guru who disapproved the distinctions between man and man based on caste, creed or race. He lived from 1855 AD to 1928 AD.

Sri Narayana Guru, a visionary and a social reformer, who worked for the promotion of the welfare of the downtrodden, was also well versed in the various branches of the Sanskrit and Tamil scriptural literature. He thus stood as a symbol of harmony, synthesis and "one world". Each person may belong to a particular religion but, he said, Truth, brotherhood, love and kindliness are inherent in every religion. The goal before everyone is also common, viz., Advaita, Lord Krishna's acting as chanoteer of His disciple Arjuna is a remarkable example of His compassion. In one of his works, he laid great emphasis on this factor of kindness and mercy as the guiding stars of life. The Guru understood the social and spiritual necessities of the common people and he awakened humanity by propagating the glory of both god and man and spreading the message that all religious led people to the same end.

In a lecture, Pandit V. Natesan said, this illustrious leader who initiated a non-violent social transformation is remembered because he made the world different from what it was when he was growing. His mission was to dismantle the walls of distinction and build a world based on unity. "Be good, let anything be your religion", he declared, with one foot in the sands of the philosophic speculation and the other poised on the promontory of the vision of human fraternity. Sri Narayana Guru could be aptly called the prophet of a religion that goes beyond all warring faiths. Religion should be an integral part of man's growth and man should be identified as part and parcel of the vast human family.

Sri Narayana Guru, who hailed from Kerala, consecrated several temples and opened many schools and established the Sivagiri Math at Varkala in 1904. One landmark in his life was the formation of the S.N.D.P. Yogam. He faced opposition from some quarters in propagating his mission, but he held no grudge against them.

September 15, 1997

Nammazhwar's yearning 10.1

Anything associated with Sri Narayana is pleasing to the Azhwars and anything unrelated to Him is disliked by them. The Lord, who wants humanity to have the benefit of Nammazhwar's Tiruvoimozhi, chose not to grant his request to be freed from Agnana, Karma, and the mortal coil, till he (Nammazhwar) has finished the work. To make him forget his yearning for moksha, at least momentarily, the Lord revealed, one by one, His innumerable auspicious attributes, which enthralled him. Nammazhwar, lost in the blissful experience, sang His glory but soon renewed his request.

Sri. K. Varadachariar said in his exposition of the 68th verse, which begins with "Maya Vaamanane" that Nammazhwar was completely at a loss to understand why the Lord has not taken him to His feet, even though he has expressed his desire to get liberated from samsara. When he came to know that the Lord wants to have His desire to be fulfilled through him, Nammazhwar wondered why he should have been chosen for the job, when there are many Maharishis reputed for their Brahma Gnana. Instead of giving a direct answer to the Azhwar's question, the Lord revealed His magnificent and gigantic form pervading the entire universe. The Lord chose to sidetrack the question because He was keen that Nammazhwar should complete his monumental work uninterruptedly. In this context, the lecturer drew a comparison from the Mahabaratha where Sri Krishna evades two of the three questions of Duryodhana as to why He had taken food in the house of Vidura, disregarding Bhishma, Drona and himself. The Lord gave the reason for His not dining with Duryodhana, leaving the other two queries unanswered. The Lord disregarded Duryodhana because he was unrighteous.

Sri Varadhachariar said Sri Krishna's ways of manifesting Himself are indescribable. When Akrura was taking Sri Krishna

and Balarama to the court of Kamsa at the latter's bidding, he saw the vision of Sri Narayana reclining on Adishesha on the surface of the Jamuna waters, where he had gone to perform his mid-day ablutions. The puzzled Akrura looked back at the chariot, where he saw the two divine children as he had left them. Such is the "Maya" of the Lord.

March 22, 1965

Greatness of Thirumazhisai Azhwar 10.2

God's real form is a veritable puzzle and to estimate and understand it is a formidable task. To reveal it to ordinary human beings, He made His appearances, but even then His genuine identity could not be comprehended. In the first (Hayagriva) as well as the last (Sri Krishna) of His 32 incarnations, He took the role of a teacher, expounding the Vedas and the Gita. He then made His aides to be born in the world to propound the significance of the Vedas. They became the Azhwars, who steeped in devotion, also made others immerse themselves in the deep waters of dedication. Like clouds, they extracted the rainbearing particles from the sea's brine and enabled them to be converted into potable water One of these, Sudarsana, incarnated at Thirumazhisai as a child of Sage Bharagava and a damsel was deputed to disturb his penance.

Sri Embar Vijayaraghavachariar in a discourse said the youngster blossomed into a profound scholar and by a process of self-introspection, came to the final conclusion that Saivism was the best among the various systems of philosophy and turned its staunch protagonist. Peyazhwar unfolded the greatness of Vaishnavism to him and brought him back to its fold by

expounding Sri Narayana's Supremacy and the triadic concept. Doubts dispelled, the Thirumazhisai saint became a devout Vaishnavite and earned the title of "Bhaktisara" from Sri Siva Himself. Thirumazhisai Azhwar continued his Yoga at Kanchi assisted by his disciple Kanikannan. As the latter once refused to praise the local king, he was banished. The Azhwar too left the place along with him. While doing so, he sang in praise of the presiding Deity requesting Him to roll up His bed. The Lord actually accompanied them and all stayed overnight in the outskirts of the City, by which time, the king realised his mistake and God was installed back in His abode.

On another occasion a group of pandits stopped reciting the Vedas on seeing him, but later they could not proceed as they failed to recollect the last verse. The Azhwar helped them to maintain the thread of continuity. The idol in a temple where he worshipped posed in whatever direction he turned, only to reveal that God and the Azhwar were the same. A few so-called erudite persons lodged a loud protest against his getting the first honour at the conclusion of a penance, but were humiliated when the vision of God was seen in the Azhwar, showing that God converted Himself as the Azhwar and vice versa. Thirumazhisai Azhwar dedicated himself to the deity at Kumbakonam and sang several hymns.

November 17, 1965

Kulasekara's devotion to Sri Rama 10.3

One of the most zealous among the Azhwars--the incarnations of God's aides was Kulasekara. His attachment to Sri Rama was so intense that he completely identified himself with every one of His acts. He saw Sri Rama in everything everywhere and at every moment and considered that the constant chanting

of the very name of this "great repository of compassion" would make even the vast ocean of the life-cycle a mere puddle.

Sri Embar Vijayaraghavachariar, in a discourse said Kulasekara was Kausthubam-the brilliant gem worn by Sri Narayana-reborn. To him, service to God's devotees was nobler than the worship of God Himself. Stating that he would hold on to His feet in the wake of the worst adversity, he expounded the Doctrine of Absolute Refuge by comparing himself to a child which sought its mother's tender caress even after receiving several spanks, like a lotus which blossomed only when the Sun's rays fell on it and like a patient welcoming a doctor, having cured him earlier for the torture involved in the treatment of his ailment.

As king of Cheranad with his principal seat at Kozhikode, Kulasekara took pains to see that Sri Rama's name echoed all around continuously. As the Ramayana was recited, he entered into the spirit of the different characters and sang a lullaby to put the child Sri Rama in the cradle to sleep. When the episodes of Sri Rama fighting Kara and his 14,000 men single-handed and of Sri Sita's incarceration in Lanka were being narrated he ordered his own army to march to help them. His animated flights of ecstasy were quelled only when the devotees informed him that Kara and Ravana had been killed.

Kulasekara who believed that God's devotees would never steal God's property, proved their innocence when a minister, out of jealousy of their intimacy with the king, concealed a jewel, by dipping his hand in a pot containing two deadly cobras and coming out unscathed. At Tirumalai, he sang that he should remain there as a bird, a tree or a vessel used in Sri Venkateswara's rituals, or a stone-step in His sanctum or a fish in the adjoining tank to taste the devotee's feet. In Chidambaram, he worshipped Sri Govindaraja and

extolled Hanuman for having been installed close to Him. Kulasekarazhwar has rendered Sri Rama's entire life history in terse verses (akin to Sankshepa Ramayana) and that of Sri Krishna in equally crisp stanzas. He married his daughter to Sri Ranganatha in Srirangam.

November 18, 1965

Privilege and greatness of Periazhwar 10.4

Steeped in Divine ecstasy, devotees often exhibit excessive affection towards God, when they tend to forget the Supreme's real identity and that He is the sole refuge of all creations. (This is based on the rule "Ati sneha papa sankhi"). On such occasions, they show an anxiety for God's personal welfare and offer prayers and even blessings for His safety. Vishnuchitta was the first of the Azhwars to sing benedictory verses for the protection of the Lord from the effects of evil eyes cast by human beings, when He paid a visit to this world and wished Him long life("Pallandu"). He thus earned the title as the foremost among the galaxy of the apostles--Periazhwar.

Mr. K.V. Santhanagopalachariar dealing with the life of the saint in his discourse said God sent His aides to reform mankind, to instill in them the spirit of devotion, inculcate knowledge about Divinity and make them seek the path of Eternity. Himself an incarnation of Garuda. Vishnuchitta who lived in Srivilliputhur, engaged in service to God, was commanded in his dream to participate in a contest arranged by the Pandyan King to expound who among the Gods was Supreme and which was the easiest and most effective way to reach Him. Despite his plea of lack of erudition, by sheer grace of God, words started pouring out and he advanced

arguments to establish the greatness of Sri Narayana. He explained the significance of Pranava (Om) and Dvayamantra and how the Almighty was ready to grant us salvation if we surrendered at His feet.

As he was taken in a procession, seated on an elephant, after winning the prize (a bundle of gold coins), Sri Vishnu mounted on Garuda, made His appearance, at which he went into raptures and sang His glory. Placing himself in the position of Yasoda, Periazhwar composed several verses (Pasurams)about Sri Krishna's childhood days, elaborately dealing with His pranks, pastimes and miracles. He had also the unique privilege of becoming the father-in-law of Sri Ranganatha when his foster-daughter Andal married Him.

June 30, 1966

Importance of Acharya's guidance 10.5

Though God is the ultimate authority to grant salvation (Moksham) to a devotee, yet the method of approach to obtain the same can be shown only by an Acharya-the intermediary who represents the Almighty and who by his special intellectual equipment is able to dispel the disciple's spiritual ignorance and make him experience eternal bliss. His initiation will help the penitent soul to discard what is to be detested and pursue what is desirable. The Acharya is the link between the individual and the Cosmic soul. He lights the torch of wisdom in his disciple and sees that it burns continuously and also encourages him to accumulate any amount of wealth of wisdom. While even God's direct message relating to redemption may be forgotten, the sublime teachings, commentaries on God's postulates philosophic tenets and doctrines spelt out

by the Acharyas are still in tact. The three great preceptors-Sankara, Madhwa and Ramanuja have toiled, only to take us on the right path and to get us released from the cycle of birth and death. A spiritual leader's guidance is absolutely necessary even as a lotus requires the Sun's rays to blossom. Artificial heat will not make it bloom unless it is in its natural state, the stalk dipped in water and the bud looking up to the Sun. God realisation is possible only with Acharya association.

Srimath Andavan in a discourse referred to the immense benefit a devotee derives and transformation he undergoes by his association with pious men and saints. His Holiness illustrated how a disciple, with unflinching faith in his Acharya's powers. while crossing a river was able to save himself from the sudden surging floods by meditating on his Guru. An Acharya's greatest trait is his concern for his disciple's well-being and the eagerness with which he will enable him to have peeps into mysticism. A sishya can repay his debt of gratitude to his master, though his services cannot be adequately compensated, by adhering to the norms set by him and upholding the traditions.

April 13, 1973

Path of Salvation: vital role of preceptor 10.6

A safe journey in a person's life-span will be possible if he seeks the guidance of a spiritual leader. Otherwise there is every chance of his losing his moorings, drifting aimlessly and getting ultimately lost. Mind is full of vicious thoughts and is often compared to a dense jungle. If one has to clear it and remove the putrid matter it requires a huge axe and

the preceptor's role is to dispel the darkness in the mind and provide light in the form of pure knowledge. There are several methods of describing the greatness of a Guru but perhaps the most appropriate one is to call him the Sun (Bhaskara) whose rays alone can make the lotus blossom. The religious teacher will enable the disciple to get rid of impurities in thoughts and thus make the mind eligible for being dedicated at God's feet. An acharya who laid the path of Visishtadwaida for the benefit of people ten centuries ago, Ramanuja was termed a "Bhaskara" for his exceptional traits, the outstanding quality being his humility and readiness to discard orthodoxy. He acknowledged scholarship and devotion as the hallmarks of a virtuous person irrespective of the caste from which he hailed. He had received tuition from two eminent personalities who were not from the upper strata. Just because a sugarcane, among so many straight ones, had grown a little bent, its sweetness will not be less. So too the case of a flower which may not confine itself to the usual form but its fragrance will in no way diminish thereby. For him, Knowledge was supreme.

Sri Mannargudi Sambasiva Bhagavathar in a discourse said Ramanuja wrote commentaries for Gita and the Brahmasutras with Bhakthi forming the background for his analysis. He systematised religious worship in temples by prescribing the time-schedule for rites and festivals. His sole aim in life was to be ever at the service of God. His preceptor initiated him into a mantra, guaranteeing him that by chanting it, he could go to Heaven but cautioning him that should he divulge it to others, he would have to proceed to hell. He deliberately broke the oath of secrecy and proclaimed to all citizens preferring them to get salvation leaving himself condemned for violating the vow. His Guru appreciated his concern for humanity.

December 7, 1977

Noble traits of God's messengers 10.7

Among the innumerable creations - sentient and insentient of the Almighty, the human being is the most privileged. Apart from the advantages he enjoys over His other creations, he has the rare gift of the faculty of thinking and discrimination. Even with his limited knowledge man has achieved tremendous progress in various fields.

If he ponders a while on the source his wisdom, he will certainly be convinced of the presence of an unseen guide and will perceive the protection of a mighty force. That power is God and His supremacy has to be acknowledged. Though He may not be seen and may not speak, but deputes His chosen representatives to spread His message. The sons of God - Saints, apostles and mystics are symbols of piety and purity.

These messengers displayed no desire to enjoy mundane pleasures but they always beseeched the Lord to grant them salvation. In the midst of their activities, they upheld the religious duties and in their outpourings through literature, hymns and some in the language of "absolute" music, conveyed their sentiments and their anguish at being away from God.

One among them even rejected precious gifts from a king - he preferred the Kingdom of God than ordinary boons. The praise of God was more important than extolling man, he felt.

Invariably such noble men had been subjected to rigorous discipline from their childhood. In olden days, parents used to train their wards in etiquette, in offering worship, in maintaining their character and in remaining contented. Seeing the inherent goodness in a devotee, the ruler of the area granted him enough land to keep the

family above want, enabling him to continue his spiritual pursuits uninterruptedly.

To him was born a child, which displayed rare talent. Growing in the midst of religious fervour, it turned out to be an ardent devotee who composed thousands of songs, each saturated with profound philosophic truths. He was ever immersed in the ocean of "Rama-Bhakthi". That was Thyagaraja, one of the innumerable recipients of Divine Grace in recent years who proved the efficacy of unalloyed devotion, said Sri T.S. Balakrishna Sastrigal in a discourse.

July 9, 1984

Essential aspects of spiritual knowledge 10.8

The relationship between God and man, how to establish it if it has not been done and how to keep it permanent are the essential aspects of spiritual knowledge that has to be gained by those who desire to totally snap their involvement in the cycle of re-births. These subjects have been focussed by a galaxy of saints who, enraptured by the beatific vision of the Lord, flew into ecstasy and rendered their experience through songs called "Pasurams" for the benefit of posterity. They have laid stress on the fact that salvation could be attained by those who have sought retirement from life, who have practised austerity and who have remained uninfluenced by the Senses.

One of these God-elects, who turned out to be a fountain source of all revelations was Nammazhwar. The concluding

section of his Thiruvoimozhi dwells on the soul's journey towards the Divine goal to gain Infinite Bliss-- the Lord's abode. He pleads with the Almighty not to discard him. "What can I do without you? Whom else can I approach for protection? You have taken me into Your fold even as the glowing red-hot iron absorbs drops of water sprinkled on it. Do not forsake me." This is an example of the ultimate in devotional fervour.

Dr. K.A. Manavala Iyengar in his discourse, said the Divya Prabhandam (Thiruvoimozhi) describes the efforts of the Supreme Being to win over the Saint from the world of woes. This applies to every soul on earth. The Azhwars in general have revealed the Almighty to mankind, as a mother, as a father as the spiritual mentor and lastly as the only refuge who extends. His extraordinary mercy. God's love towards His own creations is so great that He would not let these souls be severed from Him. No doubt, they disobey His mandates, grow impure in mind and slide down the wrong incline, rolling away to dismal depths God would arrest their headlong course. The Azhwars are souls-celestial, co-ordinate and coeval with God. Nammazhwar's hymns were popularised and his message was preached by Madhurakavi Azhwar, who with cymbals in hand, went about singing the melodies.

September 28, 1987

Acharyas are chosen representatives of God 10.9

The prime need of everyone who aspires to secure liberation from re-births is to understand who God is, what His powers are and how He protects those who approach Him. Secondly, he must possess knowledge of his own Self, his limitations

and how he should conduct himself. The third requirement is to study the relationship between the two. To explain this, spiritual guides are made to appear in the world periodically. They are entrusted with the task of spreading spiritual knowledge and enable their disciples to obtain salvation. Their mastery of the Vedas is expected to put individuals on the correct path.

To propagate the cult of Vaishnavism, God deputed the Azhwars who established the Truth and Reality through their hymns. But a greater burden was thrust on the preceptors, who carry the message, far and wide, advising men to follow the tenets and rigidly uphold the injunctions. They dispelled darkness and confusion in the minds of people. They were broad-minded and wanted everyone to reach God's abode. A shining example of such a tolerant outlook was that of a saint who, when charged with the work of reorganisation of temple administration, took the help of another illustrious savant to deal with those dedicated to Lord Siva. While the Vaishnavite mystic systematised the Prabhandams of Azhwars, the others collated the Thevarams and other Divine works into "Thirumurai". He was Ranganathamuni, popularly called Nathamunigal.

In a discourse, Sri Yagnavarahachariar referred to the manner in which Nathamunigal could dig out the hymns of the Azhwars. Struck by the devotional content of just a few of these songs, he went in search of the remaining and later through mystic powers, "learnt" all the Prabhandams of the 10 apostles, from Nammazhwar, collected them and presented to humanity all the 4,000 of them. Nathamunigal wrote treatises on meditation and devotion. He was ranked as a "Muni" (Sage) by virtue of his disciplined life, wealth of wisdom and mind of dispassion. Though they may be simple and move freely with all, the Acharyas should not be mistaken as ordinary human beings. They are living Gods and are chosen represen-

tatives to interpret His gospel. The greatest sin is to show even the slightest discourtesy to them.

June 29, 1988

God shows the way to His kingdom 10.10

The fundamental message that can be culled out of scriptural texts is about the permanent relationship between God and His creations (human beings). Man should first know what his aim should be in this short stay and where he has to proceed. God on the other hand wants to know when a devoted individual will come to His abode and how He should help him to gain his objective.

God is concerned that even when opportunities have been provided by Him, man fails to secure a place in His kingdom. But He is keen that the tormented soul should reach Him. What does God expect from us? Nothing extraordinary. He has made it pain that all that we should demonstrate is sincerity. There should be no antagonism towards God nor should anyone carry prejudices or wrong notions. No doubt most of us are deeply religious and faithfully adhere to scriptural injunctions in carrying out worship in accordance with established procedure but very often this display may be superficial, not stemming out of the bottom of the heart.

God desires that we should be sincere. He wants to assess the intensity of our devotion. Likewise, He also feels He should conquer even those who hate Him. Many may pretend to denegrate God outwardly but in their heart-of-hearts they may obey Him. God loses when people hold on to His golden feet. Men keen to win the Almighty should prove that they are but His servants ready to carry out His commands.

Sri K. Varadachariar in a discourse spelt out the essential features of philosphy contained in the work Navarathnamalai by Sri Pillailokacharya. On their part, people should declare themselves as God's servants. They should dissociate themselves from the influence exerted by the Senses. This is possible when they treat this body as their foe, since the sensory organs are bound to tempt them to enjoy worldly pleasures. People should always think of the Almighty seated in their hearts, giving up attachments and keep God in the place of our parents, relatives and associates. Unlike a wafer being tossed about by the waves on their crests, a person should behave like a huge fish that remains immersed under water and lives unaffected.

The role of a preceptor in leading a devotee to God is illustrated by the story of a father who, immediately after the birth of a child, left on a business voyage spending years overseas. His son who also grew up as a trader undertook a similar trip. Both met at a place and not knowing their relationship. entered into an argument but their respective identities were revealed by a third person. Faith in Him will make God grant us peace.

February 3, 1990

Body-soul tieup in Divine service 10.11

One of the fundamental lessons to be assimilated from scriptural texts is about the permanent bond between God and His creations. The human body is a precious gift given by God and hence man is bound to express his gratitude for His noble gesture. Within each body, a soul has been housed and as such, both should submit themselves to the Divine benefactor and be at His service at all times. There should be a great thirst to serve Him so as to keep alive the bond.

Nammazhwar, whose contribution to religion and devotional literature through his hymn "Thiruvoimozhi" in 1,000 verses, forming part of 4,000 of all 12 Azhwars (called Nalayira Divya Prabhandam), explains the nature of this link in one of the verses, The universe, with all its sentient and non-sentient beings, is to be considered as God's body. This means He is immanent and resides within each one of His creations. As the motivating force enshrined in each one, He directs all their activities. The individual soul and the body should therefore take all efforts to please Him through ardent continuous service, says another verse of the apostle.

In a discourse, Sri Sriman Narayana Jeeyar Swami (of Vijayawada) explained the Doctrine of soul-body tieup and the consequent need to attend on Him with dedication, by referring to the statements in the Upanishads. The motto of Divine service can be illustrated by the anxiety displayed by a spiritual leader. After conducting a religious rite, the leader's disciple collected the remaining articles but since a dog had consumed a jaggery-ball, the total fell short. The former was not happy, though the performer of the rite was ready to replace it. The Acharya said what was lost could not be regained.

Likewise, saints regret the time wasted even in the past, in not worshipping God. Of course, their assurance to be at His command now and in the future is there for ever. When devotees are engaged in serving God, their attention would not be diverted in showing jealousy, hatred, passion, ego and other evils, which arise out of the free-play of the Senses. They may not see God directly but that He is the in-dweller can surely be experienced. The Prahlada episode reveals that He pervades the entire universe and can present Himself from any object. The cultivation of the idea that all have originated from

God will put an end to mutual strife and petty feuds. Ambition there can be for anyone, but it should be contained within limits.

June 15, 1992

Greatness of Vedanta Desika 10.12

The tirade against religious traditions has been in existence for a long time and regretfully some members of the Hindus themselves had taken the lead to deride some of the ancient customs. Spiritual leaders and devotees had tried to combat these onslaughts. For instance, even 700 years ago, the Ranganatha idol in Srirangam was sought to be stolen by marauders but timely action by an eminent scholar resulted in its being removed to a distant place and reinstalled when the threat receded.

Even now few seek to know why when their help was indented for the construction of the temple, they were prevented from entering the sanctum sanctorum. They should be made aware that even from a particular community from which the priests are chosen, all cannot get into this holy place. They too should join only the masses.

The glorious and dazzling image of Ranganatha was rescued by Vedanta Desika whose contribution to Vaishnavism and its philosophy is prolific and phenomenal. In his days, religious bigotry was rampant and a ruler even caused the gouging of the eyes of a saintly man as he would not subscribe to his views. "Desika" is a term applicable to all preceptors but even as Gita refers only to Bhagavad Gita and Sahasranamam indicates the praise on Vishnu, Desika will mean

only Vedanta Desika. He has written poems, dramas, stotras, philosophic treatises and Gadyams. A boy prodigy, his precocity was in evidence when he was hardly 5 or 6 by helping scholars to continue the Vedic recitation left unfinished earlier. As a child, he was called Venkatanadha.

Sri R. Aravamudan, in a discourse, said the Divine couple Ranganatha and Ranganayaki admiring his scholastic and other excellences awarded the titles of Sarva Thanthra Swatantra and Kavitharkika Simham. During one night, he composed 1000 verses on Lord's Padukas but even then, out of humility, he said his capacity could be compared to that of a pig's which yields many litters whereas the erudition of his rivals'(though defeated in the contest) was akin to that of the only calf given birth by an elephant. His detachment to worldly activities was such that even when his close associate Vidyaranya, who occupied a coveted post in Vijayanagar kingdom, invited him to receive gifts, he declined stating that he had been left with an enviable legacy in the form of Lord Varadaraja of Kancheepuram. In one hymn, Vedanta Desika has detailed the nine steps to heaven. He had mastery over Tamil and had written numerous Tamil works proving his proficiency in "Ubhaya Vedanta".

June 19, 1993

No qualification is needed for a devotee 10.13

Even the lowest category job in an administrative set-up or in a business organisation requires a minimum qualification. There is hence no need to state that technical positions and higher posts need men of excellent academic distinctions. Similarly, those who conduct worship to idols in temples or

priests who are engaged to perform religious rites and ceremonies should have gone through intense training over years. The learning of the Vedas or the chanting of the mantras arise out of hard discipline under erudite scholars. But in one particular field - of submitting one's pleas before God and singing His praise, no specific qualification is expected. Anyone can practise devotion by which a link is established between God and man. Should a person possess compassion, tranquillity and similar traits before he can call himself a devotee? None of these is necessary for a devotee.

Yamunacharya (or Alavandar) says that one who yearns to eulogise the Lord need not possess any of the rigid requisites All that is expected of a devotee is a sincere expression of the pangs of suffering experienced by him by being kept separated from God. His submission at the Lord's feet makes him eligible to approach Him. Even saints and Divine bards had found it difficult to describe or portray the forms and charm of the Almighty. There is nothing surprising in ordinary men failing in their attempt to sing His glory. But God accepts the genuine prayers of all. Do not boulders and pebbles thrown in a sea go down alike? So too God, the ocean of mercy, enjoys the songs and hymns in His praise by anyone. While God is seated within a body that is normally filled with impurities, Yamuna (Alavandar), a worthy predecessor of Ramanuja, who combined in himself the fervid mystical experience of the Alwars with a prodigious knowledge of Vedanta, points out how He would enable one to express his intense feelings if the mind is kept clean.

Dr. M.A. Venkatakrishnan in a discourse said that no one took a bath before having a dip in the sacred river Ganga. So too, a devotee need not fear that he has not prepared himself before resorting to the path of Bhakti. Just as Ganga removes all the sins of a man of faith, ardent worship and

sincere prayers will wipe out the consequences of his past evil acts. There should be constant remembrance of God coupled with faith.

December 10, 1993

True devotion fetches rich reward 10.14

Messengers of God whose mission is to help aspirants to get over the ills of this worldly life, form a class by themselves. They are not concerned about caste, wealth, learning and similar considerations. Their only duty is to make people reach God. Among such apostles was a Vaishnavite minstrel. Thiruppan Azhwar who spread God's glory through music. His life reminds that of Nandanar, a saint, whom God invited to His temple in Chidambaram. True devotion will fetch rich reward. Divine grace will be available for anyone, irrespective of status or colour.

The most enviable quality of the Lord, is "easy approachability". He lavishes His compassion and affection on those who choose to take shelter in Him. Even as a cow demonstrates its concern for its just-delivered calf, God welcomes to His fold those who show their repentance and seek refuge in Him. Discarding the objections raised by Sugriva whom He had befriended earlier. Rama took Vibhishana under His protection without looking into his antecedents. The Lord is never harsh to anyone nor will He give punishment unless absolutely compelled. God as Rama, could have taken the life of Ravana, when the latter stood helpless on the battlefield. He allowed him to get back and return refreshed. So too was God's mercy on the young devotee Prahlada, when his father had obtained a boon not to be killed by any means.

Dr. T.D. Gnanasundaram in a lecture said Thiruppan Azhwar was deeply devoted to Lord Ranganadha (idol) in the spiritual-capital Srirangam. The apostle used to spend time on the banks of the Cauvery singing God's names with the help of his Veena. On one occasion he was deeply absorbed in Divine consciousness and had gone into a trance. He was awakened by the temple priest by throwing a stone at him, which caused an injury to the saint. The priest was later shocked to find blood trickling from the idol. The priest who was asked to lead the Azhwar into the temple, carried him to the holy presence of Ranganadha.

The ten verses that Thiruppan Azhwar composed adoring the Lord is called Amalan-Adi-Piran (Pure, primordial cause and the Lord or Father) and contain high philosophic import. "I do not know any penance nor did I perform austerities but my joy is boundless on seeing your bewitching form".

January 4, 1994

Avoid three mistakes to realise God 10.15

One of the fundamental requirements of a person who sincerely desires to escape from worldly bondage is first to know his Self, i.e. his own nature and limitations, wherefrom he had come, what should be his goal and how to reach it. He should next understand the real nature of the Supreme Lord, His forms and His traits. Next arises the need to find out the relationship between the two (the individual and the Reality) which will make him worship Him and serve Him, here as well in His abode. Other considerations are secondary if these facts are realised.

But a person is usually prone to commit three mistakes which act as hurdles and separate him from God. He alienates himself from God by drawing a curtain. Second, he acquires

knowledge that will lead him on the weary path and seek protection of those who have limited powers. Third, he may treat the body and soul as identical, not aware that the former will perish whereas the latter is eternal. The wise will treat all souls alike.

Man knows how to conduct himself. For instance, a diabetes patient will certainly take care to avoid taking sugary items, being conscious of his defective system. Men go after food, celestials seek nectar, the cow consumes grass and a dog tastes filth. Thus though all need food to survive, there is difference in the type of food. A sincere devotee will hence be keen to avoid getting into worldly entanglements and will adopt methods to approach the Lord through the procedures contained in scriptural texts.

The Jeeyar Swami of Ahobila Math, in a discourse, referred to the outpourings of Thondaradipodi Azhwar in his "Thirumaalai", where he regrets how he had wasted his precious time without searching for the Truth all the time and allowing himself to be lured by temptations. A person anxious to snap worldly ties will serve God here so long as he is alive and later in heaven. He will not only carry out the directions of the Lord (contained in the scriptures) but also deeply revere and honour God's representatives and pious and noble agents who always keep God's vision in their hearts. To such aspirants, Lord Lakshminarasimha will be eager to grant salvation. The duty of devotees is to adhere to the Divine commands.

February 25, 1994

Human birth is for God realisation 10.16

The role of religion is to enable men to realise God. The sacred books and holy utterances tell them how to

experience His presence. By making His creations assume human forms, God grants them the opportunity to know His real nature. His qualities and His readiness to redeem them if they uphold scriptural injunctions. Through incarnations and other modes of revealing His presence, God displays His keenness to help them cross this ocean of bondage. Unfortunately, these people allow themselves to be immersed in worldly pleasures, yield to the influence of the senses, thus getting involved in earthly activities. God has hence found out a way to attract them by residing in consecrated idols, worshipping which devotees derive immense joy.

Saints, who had also experienced supreme joy is praising the beauty of these images, had left their impressions for posterity. God has forms. He answer our prayers. He is full of auspicious qualities through which He extends His mercy and confers His grace. He is devoid of any blemish and occupies a place in our hearts as a permanent indweller. Having given us this body and guiding us on the paths available to get freed from ties, He watches us, whether we do good or bad. His compassion is abundant and He is keen to take us into His fold. The hymns of the Azhwars, extolling God's powers, say nothing can take place without His approval. He will give us knowledge and He may also deny it, for reasons best known to Him. His acts cannot be questioned and none has the power to stop Him from His decision.

These pious and Divine representatives refer to the master-servant relationship between God and men. Obeying His dictates will fetch us good. Thirumangai Azhwar, who saw God and conversed with Him. explains in his innumerable hymns how the idols when worshipped would bring immeasurable peace. He has also told us how to reach salvation.

Explaining the significance of the reclining posture of the idols, Sri. S. Ramanujachariar in a discourse said that

just as a creditor would adopt the tactic of lying at the doorsteps of the debtor if the latter dodges repayment, God also resorts to this act to compel us to return to His kingdom should they forget their duty. "This wonderful body was not used by men to worship God but was recklessly permitted to tumble into the ocean of transmigration and get wrecked". What sin can be more heinous than that of this arch-thief who makes away with the soul which is God's, say Divine statements. Thirumangai Azhwar has sung innumerable verses on deities in temples all over India. The core of the message is that, as vassals, devotees should offer their service to the Divine Couple who are inseperable. The collective works of all the mystics is called Dravida Veda.

June 1, 1994

Manavala Maamunigal, an apostle of God 10.17

Even as God takes incarnations to re-establish Moral Order when there are signs of deterioration, He sends His apostles sometimes to enlighten and elevate the erring humanity from the mire of mundane existence. This He does by imparting them the true significance of the scriptures. These Divine messengers inspire people to do service to the Almighty and uphold His commands, ultimately enabling them to reach His abode of eternal peace and joy. Among such illustrious representatives was Varavara Muni in the south, well-known as Manavala Maamunigal (1370-1443 AD). Among his works for posterity is a brilliant commentary on the manual of Srivaishnavism called Srivachanabushanam.

Ramanuja, who propagated the Visishtadvaita philosophy, had clearly established that the Supreme God is full of auspicious qualities. He had made it obligatory that the hymns

of the Azhwars (called the Divya Prabhandam) should also be recited along with the Sanskrit scriptures. He codified certain rituals in temple worship and His disciples continued the task. Ramanuja reappeared as Manavala Maamunigal who is considered to be the last of the early religious preceptors who occupied the pontific seat of Ramanuja at Srirangam.

In one of his verses, Manavala Maamunigal says he was fortunate enough to have received the grace of Lord Ranganatha while residing in Srirangam and to have studied the works of Nammazhwar which served as nourishment, to his soul. He was also lucky to digest understand and assimilate the teachings of Madhurakavi Azhwar and to remain absorbed in the teachings of Azhwars and Acharyas. He was free from envy. Admiring Varavara Muni's depth and learning, the illustrious teacher, Srisailesa, trained him to succeed to the pontific seat. He got ordained into ascetic order and was given the name of Manavala Maamunigal by Lord Ranganatha Himself who also directed that the Pallavarayan Math be made his residence.

In a lecture, Dr. M .A. Venkatakrishnan said that many celebrated Acharyas of the day became Manavala Maamunigal's disciples, one of them being the Vanamamalai Ramanuja Jeeyar, the founder of the Thothadri Math. Again, as commanded by Lord Ranganatha (through the priest), he expounded Thiruvoimozhi, based on the five earlier commentaries, for one full-year and the Lord appearing as a boy sang a verse in his praise (recited even now) and disappeared. Sri Manavala Maamunigal entrusted the task of spreading Ramanuja philosophy to eight of his followers. The Acharya has explained the efficacy of the Doctrine of Surrender, the nature of the devotee who submits himself at the feet of the Lord, the Do's and Donts' for him and the devotion to be shown to the spiritual teacher.

November 7, 1994

True devotee sees God in all 10.18

A sincere devotee of God will out of deep anguish, shed tears on seeing another human being in distress and show his eagerness to mitigate his suffering. Such a feeling of compassion arises out of the knowledge that all are creations of God - humans, animals, birds and plants. God is an indweller in each one of them. Souls are similar in all beings, though the bodies they assume based on their past deeds are different. Votaries of God, hence do not show any distinction. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna declares this principle in clear terms.

An instance of a saint displaying such an attitude of extreme compassion was when he was asked to fetch a leaf from a plantain tree. As he cut the leaf, a few drops of water appeared from the stem and he fell down in a swoon as he felt he had taken away a life. Identical was his concern and grief when he heard the appeal of a frog that was held in the mouth of a snake which was about to swallow it and its appeal to save it. This Divine personality was Koorathazhwan, a disciple of Ramanuja, whom he ably assisted in preaching God's message. He possessed the qualities of a true devotee - of seeing God in everything and desirous of sharing others distress.

In a discourse, Sri V.N. Gopaladesikan said, Koorathazhwan, who was a ruler of a small estate, discarded his wealth and position when he was called for the service of the Divine to propagate the importance of the Doctrine of Surrender. On his way to join his spiritual guide, his wife who accompanied him, took with her a golden bowl in which he used to have his meal. Sensing this, he ordered her to throw it away lest it should attract the attention of thieves.

Wealth can make anyone giddy, explained the speaker through the tale of a sparrow which had obtained a few grains

as its food. It was creating a lot of noise. When the king ordered the grains to be seized. the bird became more noisy to express its feelings and even after the grains were returned, it continued to make noise. The bird's feeling was that the king was afraid of it and that was the reason that the grains were restored to it.

Religious history is replete with examples of God-men who through their lives, asked those were who eager to reach God's kingdom to follow the guidelines shown by them and avoid doing acts prohibited by them. These regulations represent the Do's and Donts' of religious exercises. Kurathazhwan pierced his eyes with a needle to save his master who was subjected to torture and later even prayed that the offender may be pardoned.

January 25, 1995

Seek God as life is ephemeral 10.19

The rare privilege conferred by God on human beings is the golden opportunity to practise spiritual exercises. Out of His extreme compassion to help them get out of the quagmire of the worldly bonds, He has provided several methods to acquire knowledge by which they can understand the nature of their own Self, their links with the Lord, their goal and the means to reach it. At every stage, they are reminded of the ephemerality of their existence.

The principal message about the relationship between God man and the world is spelt out in the Vedic revelations. Since they are terse, their elaboration in Epics was made available. Subsequently expositions of sages were placed before them. Later, Codes of conduct were written and principles

of moral life were pronounced through saintly personalities. When even these were not sufficient, the mystical outpourings of holy men in their hymns were written down which helped men to lead lives of moral purity.

The main stress in all these scriptural works is that they should do only good and carry out their duties without being motivated by a desire to obtain the fruits. Also, their deeds should be to please the Almighty. The soul-stirring hymns of Divine bards known as the "Azhwars", are called Divya Prabhandam. They glorify the auspicious attributes of the Almighty and how He rescues men, who cling to Him, from the worldly tentacles. These Tamil songs are also called Dramidopanishad. That such saints will be contributing to the aspirants' spiritual needs at a later stage, had been anticipated long ago by Sage Vyasa, who in his Bhagavatham visualised the birth of God-men like Nammazhwar and other mystics at various places in Tamil Nadu.

Sri Mukkur Lakshminarasimhachariar in a discourse, referred to a psalm in which an Azhwar compares the human body to a house whose walls have been built by flesh, supported by pillar columns made of bones and the entire structure held firm by the nerves. This decaying dwelling house has nine exits. To avoid getting entangled in earthly life, the saints have recommended that man should seek refuge in God, mingle only with men of piety and utter the Lord's names constantly, which will purify the mind and ensure detachment from activities which pull in different directions.

The repetition of the name Rama will result in moral uprightness. That is the reason why Ravana, who had abducted Sita did not dare to approach Her, by dressing himself as Rama because the moment he donned such a garb, his mind would automatically resist indulging in any misconduct.

February 21, 1995

Saints show the way to realise God 10.20

Caught inextricably in the web of worldly activities, a human being feels helpless and hence desires to get rid of his miseries and enjoy happiness. But he is baffled as how to put an end to his grief. Can he avoid sufferings by dominating over others as he is keen to experience joy somehow? Sages and saints, gifted with spiritual wisdom, have left us various directives to seek Bliss.

The Ramayana illustrates how God-incarnate conducted Himself amongst citizens and made them happy. He shared their grief and demonstrated how His heart bled when they suffered. If they were happy, He behaved as a father would seeing his son in a good mood. Hence, when a person is immersed in sorrow, there should be someone, who could act as a dependable companion. There is one whom the Vedas term as 'Paramatma' or the Supreme Being. He will be with devoted persons at all times. But the latter should hold on with faith to His feet firmly and surrender to him. Can this permanent friend be seen in flesh and blood, face to face? It is possible to experience His presence by the utterance of a mystic syllable (Mantra) prescribed by the illustrious spiritual dignitary - Ramanuja.

Sri Chinna Sriman Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami in a discourse, explaining the contents of the Acharya's swan-song, 'Gadyathrayam', a collection of three prose-poems, said, man has freedom given to him just sufficient to work out his liberation. The Supreme Being is defined as one from Whom everything has emanated and sustained. For the tormented individual, who want to reach God. Ramanuja has explained the peace that a devotee can derive from worshipping the consecrated idols installed in temples, which God assumes in accordance to their wishes.

The idols are co-eval with God, and are Divine in nature, retaining in them all the powers of the Supreme. What is needed is the confidence that God resides in them. On that score, they cannot behave in an indifferent manner, remembering that though a generator is manufactured by men yet when it starts operating, they cannot touch it. God is the whole, the idol a part He is the main torch from which many lamps are lit; He is an inexhaustible source of mercy and resplendent qualities. The idols reflect all the attributes.

In the 'Saranagati Gadyam' the contrite soul begs the Divine couple to save him from perils, while in the second 'Sriranga Gadyam', Ramanuja pays homage to the idols of Ranganatha and His consort. In the 'Vaikunta Gadyam', the Acharya gives a picture of the Lord's Divine abode, how He stays there adored by His deputies and those, who have reached there and the facilities available there to serve the Divine couple.

March 23, 1995

God rescues His true devotee 10.21

The power that God wields is limitless and as such the deeds which a human being may consider impossible, can be carried out by Him in a trice. If He decides, He can make the dumb talk and perform several miracles. To many devotees, He has revealed His presence. In spite of being compassionate, Lord Krishna, at the time of returning to His permanent abode on completion of His mission regretted that He had not adequately responded to the stirring appeal of Draupadi when she was about to be shamed by wicked elements though He had caused her garment to flow uninterruptedly.

That God rushes to the rescue of His devotee who utter His glorious names has been proved beyond doubt in many instances. Among the outstanding beneficiaries of this simple devotional exercise were Bhadrachala Ramadas and Saint Thyagaraja who clung themselves to the feet of Rama.

In the case of Ramadas, his deep devotion to Rama developed when the advice to hold on to Rama's feet was tendered by Kabirdas in his dream, though the latter lived nearly two centuries before him. Ramadas, a Revenue official in Bhadrachalam area under a Muslim ruler, had abiding faith in the Lord's dispensation.

Once, when Ramadas and his equally devoted wife were attending on guests, their child quietly slipped from their midst and fell into a huge cauldron full of hot porridge and died. The mother remained calm till the guests left after lunch and then informed her husband of the tragedy. Both placed the body at the feet of Rama's idol worshipped by them and wept, when God answered their sincere prayer. Has not God declared that He would give succour to anyone who takes refuge in Him, even if he be an enemy?

Sri R. Aravamudan in his Harikatha referred to the extreme confidence Ramadas placed in the Lord which made him construct a temple for Him in Bhadrachalam, install idols and bedeck them with jewels out of the State's revenue collections. For the misuse of exchequer's funds, he was sentenced to imprisonment for 12 years. A question raised often is about the injustice done to him by God when Ramadas had after all diverted the money only for good purpose.

God in His Gita has pointed out that such an act should be considered a dereliction of duty. The intention was no doubt good but the manner in which it was executed was improper. However, Rama dressed as a sympathiser with

Lakshmana, returned the due sum and vanished. Ramadas got relief when he pleaded before the Divine Mother who always functions as a recommending authority and urged God to ignore the penitent's mistakes.

June 13, 1995

Discovery of Self, end of human endeavour 10.22

Man cannot live merely by instinct and impulse, like animals. He has the need of a wider view of their consequences and has the task of regulating his emotions, desires and habits to make him realise his true nature and real good. Today, men in all walks of life feel in their hearts that the world cannot deliver what is needed for human pursuit. Since religion is based on the strong foundation of philosophy of love, it alone can save the world from catastrophe.

The prevailing material growth cannot satisfy the innate human longing. It sheds no light on the complex problems one has to deal with in life. The mind divorced of religion, can never be controlled. It is the liberation of the human soul and the development of human personality, quite distinctive from the animal state, that will help one to attain the goal of life. A man steeped in nescience cannot lead another on the path of spiritual realisation. To fight against falsehood, vanity, oppression over innocent persons and sensual enjoyment on the one hand and to establish truthfulness, purity, self-surrender, firm faith in God and steadfastness in devotion on the other are the aims of religious mission.

One of our greatest spiritual torch bearers, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had said that his message stressed on the develop-

ment of individual personality and in maintaining the pre-eminence of faith, over other considerations. It proclaims that everyone has the right to worship God and to recite His names. Chaitanya adds that life remains unfulfilled without the vision of the Supreme. "We can see God through the eyes of intuitive wisdom". Equality between man and man can be established only on the basis that all souls are part and parcel of God. Chaitanya brought about such an equality of humans, by cultivation of devotion to God.

The whole social fabric of India rests on the foundation of restraint. Good of the humanity and of the world depends on the spiritual and cultural uplift of the individuals, Citing Sri Chaitanya, Sri B.P. Yati Maharaj said in a lecture, that none should exploit another, everyone should give ungrudgingly the respect due to another, should display humility and forbearance. The Vedas are the constitutional provisions of Hindu religion and hence are to be obeyed. In the shape of hymns, they represent higher knowledge on the spiritual plane.

The Upanishads proclaim "Arise and awake, approach a preceptor and learn from him the means of God realisation. Lord Krishna will get enshrined in your heart when you sincerely recite His names". An aspirant's prayer, according to the Bhagavatham, is to ask God to grant him the boon that he may be favoured with the company of holy devotees whose hearts have become purified listening to His pastimes and chanting Divine names.

June 23, 1995

Serve God with total surrender 10.23

Religion offers solace to a man in his trials and tribulations in this world. It suggests that the lasting and final solution to difficulties is to surrender completely to God. In many

cases, an individual has an innate feeling that he fails to realise his limitations. Only the experience of the vicissitudes of life will force him to know that he has to rely on some Supreme Power which possesses full strength and compassion to help him. Man's only way to achieve peace and happiness is to unreservedly throw himself on the grace of such a Supreme Power, viz, God.

No doubt, several vistas are open to man but because of his limitations, the paths of action, wisdom and devotion will prove arduous. The only foolproof choice is "Surrender", a method that is easily available to anyone who seeks asylum in Him and entertains absolute confidence that His protection will never fail. The most important requirement is 'Confidence' that God shall be with him always.

In return for his total dependence on Him, God has given a firm assurance that His declaration to extend His protection to devotees is unalterable. The clarion call of the Lord to His devotees is contained in the Ramayanam, Mahabharatham and Varaha Puranam. He has unequivocally vowed that His pledge is to give refuge to anyone who acknowledges his helplessness before God.

Having thus known about the nature of the Lord that He is matchless and has unrestricted powers, a devotee should remember about his link and relationship with God, that he is a mere slave. The Azhwars and Acharyas have clearly stated that the bond between the Almighty and a devotee should be strengthened. While surrendering, one should pray that all obstacles be removed to reach the goal, viz, to serve the Divine couple in Srivaikuntam permanently.

In a discourse, Sri R. Madhavachariar said, that there is no guarantee that the Lord may straightway condone all the penitent's blemishes because of the magnitude of his sins.

To help the aspirant, the Divine Mother is ever gracious to recommend such a sincere person to the Lord. The Ramayana illustrates how in order to fulfil the purpose of their incarnations (to establish the efficacy of Surrender), the marriage of the Divine couple was brought about after Rama's study. Subsequent to Surrender, he must be at the service of the Lord. How to serve the Lord has been portrayed through the anxiety shown by Lakshmana to remain ever vigilant. Scriptures also hold that the preceptor alone has the capacity to lead an aspirant towards God. Lakshmana symbolises 'service' to God and an Acharya makes God overlook disciple's sins.

August 4, 1995

God's any form may be worshipped 10.24

One of the outstanding features of Hinduism is that it comprises many systems of philosophy, varieties of religious beliefs and permits worship of God in any form depending on the faith of its followers. Devotees can use any language of their choice to extol the form of God they prefer to worship. Certain regulations have been prescribed by saints who propagated the different schools of thought. Some of the mystics revelled in praising God through their outpourings in hymns which brought out God's auspicious traits and how He is ready to help aspiring men to get rid of their worldly bondage. Some of these spiritual guides formulated certain codes regarding personal conduct and rules governing the modes of worship.

Two prominent systems came to the forefront, viz., Saivism and Vaishnavism; the former spread through the Nayanmars and latter by Azhwars and Acharyas (spiritual leaders). They integrated philosophy and religion and led men on the path

to the abode of God. They also prescribed the guidelines relating to the nature of the deities, in what way they should be pleased and the rituals connected with worship. There was no restriction on the form of God they desired to adore and about the language by which praise could be showered to invoke His grace. People were also given the option to keep the idols of God.

In the matter of disciplines to be observed Ramanuja promoting Sri Vaishnavism and in which all the wisdom of the ancients flowed, codified the various tenets. He was broad in his outlook so as to defy his master by disclosing the secrets embedded in the incantations to all, but his intention was appreciated and later he was embraced by the teacher. The Azhwars and the preceptors delved into the depth of Divine consciousness and enriched through their outpourings religious literature.

In a lecture on the duties and responsibilities of Sri Vaishnavites, Sri S.R. Themozhiyar cited Ramanuja's recipe regarding their behaviour in private life and in society. Like salt which is absolutely necessary for any item of food to be tasty, but which has to be added only in a proper proportion, he should be pious and carry out all spiritual obligations but should be helpful to the masses and mingle with other servants of God. Like a fowl that clears the rubbish and selects the insects and worms to satisfy its appetite, he should study the literature but digest only what is needed for his spiritual progress. Like a crane which remains calm in water allowing the fingerlings to escape but picks only the bigger fish, he should desist from chasing worldly pleasures and material prosperity but be ever eager to serve God. The Azhwars and saints have in short advised men to cling to the feet of God.

February 10, 1996

Knowledge must be wedded to devotion 10.25

Two main streams can be discerned very clearly in the philosophical traditions of the Vedas - Jnana and Bhakti. All the schools in the fold of the Vedanta give emphasis to either of the two in the interpretation of their concepts. But knowledge and devotion must never be misunderstood as antithetical to one another. In fact in the Acharyas of the different Vedanta schools both co-exist. They were mystics in their own right and the philosophies they propounded were not an abstraction but a reiteration of their spiritual experience and hence are called "Darsana".

It is in the fitness of this enduring spirit of the Vedic tradition that two of its revered Acharyas - Sankara and Ramanuja - were born on the same day though they lived centuries apart. Sankara's philosophy with its emphasis on Jnana was necessary at his time when there was lot of sentimentalism and emphasis on the Karma Kanda of the Vedas. But a few centuries later at the time of Ramanuja it was necessary to give emphasis to Bhakti since this strand in the Vedic tradition was almost forgotten. So their teachings have to be seen in the context of their times.

Ramanuja was born at Sriperumbudur in an orthodox family and his early life centered around the Lord at Kanchipuram where Yamuna, his predecessor saw him and recognising his genuis sent for him. But before Ramanuja could reach him Yamuna passed away and he found that three of his fingers were bent. Intuiting that he had some unfulfilled desires, he promised to write a commentary on the Brahmasutras bringing out the theistic aspect, name two of his outstanding disciples after Sage Parasara and Vyasa, and propagate the hymns of the Alwars when the three fingers opened.

To fulfil his mission he studied under various teachers. His difference of opinion with Yadavaprakasa regarding the interpretation of an Upanishadic statements was not taken in good spirit by the teacher who went to the extent of trying to get rid of him during a pilgrimage to Benaras. But a fellow disciple saved him, and through the help of a hunter reached Kanchipuram safely in the course of a night. It was later he realised that the Lord Himself had come in the guise of the hunter, said Swami Gautamananda in his lecture.

Ramanuja fulfilled his mission of writing a commentary on the Brahmasutras - the Sri Bhashya - with the help of Kuresa who committed the Bodhayanavritti in Kashmir to memory when the Pundits there refused to part with it. He named Kuresa's sons after the sages and included the chanting of the Alwar's hymns in the temples.

April 25, 1996

Right company enhances devotion 10.26

The Thiruppavai of Andal occupies a unique place among the various compositions enshrined in the Nalayira Divya Prabandham which is a collection of the works of the Alwars of the Srivaishnava tradition. The only woman mystic exalted to the status of an Alwar. Andal is also known as Goda and Sudikkodutha Sudarkodi, She poured out her Divine love in two works - Thiruppavai and Nachiyar Thirumozhi.

In the collection of 30 verses of the Thiruppavai which is in the form of a call to fellow devotees. Andal urges them to overcome spiritual apathy. The month in which she had chosen to perform a vow along with her friends is the Margasirsa, important spiritually. She recreates Gokula were

Lord Krishna performed His childhood sports, in the lanes of her village Srivilliputtur, where she lived in the house of her foster father.

In the opening verses of the hymns till the fifth one, the goal to be attained - eternal service to the Lord - is mentioned and the succeeding verses until the fifteenth one, there is a stirring progression in the enactment of the vow, the young maidens awakening one another to proceed together to the house of Nanda. The maidens mentioned in the verses are interpreted esoterically by the commentators of the tradition to refer to the other Alwars, whose association she seeks in her spiritual progress to attain divine communion.

In his discourse Srimad Andavan Swami said, the importance of the company of devotees of God is emphasised in the Thiruppavai. In the last among the hymns in which the girls awaken their mates, there is an exchange of words between the maiden getting ready for the vow. The girl who is awakened being an ardent devotee allows herself to be blamed for the improper drift in the conversation when they jest with one another, which shows that she is aware of the sanctity of the spiritual goal.

Awareness of one's shortcomings is a trait found only in a mature seeker of God and to accept the blame for the lapse of other fellow devotees is indeed a remarkable quality. In spite of her submission, her friends tease and admonish her for the delay in joining them, which is a test to find out whether she is established in her spiritual nature.

And it is with great elan that this maiden who is awakened last, enquires whether the others have all come. This is interpreted to show her eagerness to meet other devotees. Commentators in this context interpret the importance of seeking pious

company for spiritual progress. The last girl to be awakened is a reference to Thirumangai Azhwar who is chronologically placed last among the Alwars.

January 1, 1997

Any form of God fit for worship 10.27

Man being God's creation, he will need His protection at every stage of his existence. He cannot function independently and one way by which he seeks God's grace is to offer worship in temples and in his own house. The temple is a place of sanctity and its structure is akin to that of man's body. Like God being seated in his heart, God is enshrined in the temple's sanctum sanctorum. While offering his worship to consecrated images, man submits himself to the almighty and appeals for His compassion. He enjoys the vision of God because for him, God lives and breathes in the idols. For some of the devotees, God presents Himself in "Salagramam", a special stone formation obtained from the high attitudes of Nepal.

A notable feature of Hinduism is the liberty given to every individual to pray before any form of God. The choice is his as numerous forms have been made available. There is no conflict between one form and another as the devotee reaches the same destination. The courses followed by rivers may be different but they join the ocean ultimately. There are short and easy religious paths to avoid circuitous routes, which will naturally delay his arrival at the final point. The path of Surrender, entrusting himself to God has been advocated by some, as the easiest. Under this, he surrenders at the feet of God through the intervention of a spiritual guide who is qualified to lead him to His presence. The idols have been

carved out on the basis of information and descriptions of God in His incarnations, particularly as Rama and Krishna, contained in the scriptures. The people of ancient India saw God even in the elements of Nature such as the earth, the ether, the sea, the mountains and rivers. They were awe-struck by the vastness of the ocean and the grandeur of the latter and drew inspiration from the flow of the brooks. Those who stand on the shore of the sea pick up shells and conches, while a few who swim to a little distance obtain pearls. Those who go to the mid-portion are gifted with more precious things. Likewise, each according to his prayer, experiences God and receives God's grace.

In a discourse, Swami Ranga Priya mentioned about the different poses in which God's images have been chiselled. He is seen as reclining or standing or walking as man conducts himself and according to the wishes of His devotees. He is worshipped as "Varaha" with the Divine consort, in one of the holy places near Madras. This manifestation was taken to retrieve the universe that was kept hidden by demon, under the sea.

This form of the Lord reminds men that He is ready to make His appearance before them at the time of their departure from the world. While all faculties will fail to function at that time, for those to whom He has granted His approval to take them to His abode, He will reveal Himself.

February 5, 1997

A revolutionary spiritual guide 10.28

A traditionalist by conviction, with revolutionary ideas, faithful to ancient teachings, moderate in criticism and benevolent to all his disciples - these sum up the merits

of one of our greatest path -finders and an impeccable spiritual guide, Sri Ramanuja. The themes of devotion and surrender to God, which are essential to his teachings are based to a large extent on the hymns of the Azhwars. Even today, the worship of deities at homes and temples, the festivities and religious rites are being carried out according to his writ.

Ramanuja made a request to Lord Varadaraja of Kancheepuram, through his mentor as to how the wishes of Yamunacharya could be carried out. The Lord's reply was: "I am the Supreme Truth; resigning to God (Prapatti) is the means of getting relief from bondage; the individual soul need not think of Me at the time of death; the soul gets final release as soon as it is freed from the body; our faith is Visishtadwaita and choose Mahapurna as your preceptor". Ramanuja's advent in the Vindhya forest when he had to flee from the evil machinations of a teacher is a milestone in the extravagant benefactions of the Divine couple.

Ramanuja's commentary on the Bhagavad Gita is a work of great merit and the result of considerable thought. Among his other works are the Gadyatraya and the Nitya, devoted to practical religious chores. Inscriptional evidence shows that Ramanuja stayed at Melkote for 20 years. An important incident in his life was the recovery of the idol "Ramapriya" from Delhi. He followed a long line of Srivaishnava seers who maintained that the Supreme Being is full of auspicious attributes. His system is known as Visishtadwaita which refers to three Realities viz. God, soul and matter, the first alone being independent, the other two dependent on Him.

In his discourse on the occasion of Ramanuja Jayanthi, Sri R. Kannan Swamigal referred to the details of the Doctrine of Prapatti (Saranagati or Self-surrender) to the Lord in which He is resorted to as the sole refuge. Ramanuja was an exemplary

character without parallel and various incidents in his life bring out his broad - mindedness, burning sympathy for mankind, his unselfishness to an extraordinary degree, resourcefulness and absolute devotion to God. An able interpreter of the human heart, he won men and women of different temperaments to the path of religion by his sympathetic attitude.

With his administrative acumen, Ramanuja laid down rules and procedures for temple administration. According to him, there is no distinction between high and low, between the so-called touchables and untouchables, in the quest for Divine grace. Three idols of his have been installed in three temples.

May 14, 1997

God protects those who submit themselves to Him 10.29

When there is a categorical assurance from God that He will extend protection to those who rely on Him, there is no need to fear the worldly impacts. This does not mean that once they entrust themselves to Him, they can give up all their duties. The devotees should continue to obey the Divine injunctions without anticipating the fruits of their labour. God will respond to their prayers.

God's messengers who preach His teachings to reform people, having distinguished themselves by their personal lives and erudition, have guided them on to the correct path to reach Him. But, even these pious souls were subjected to severe tests. It may be seen that under all circumstances, they never gave up their faith but tenaciously depended on Him.

One such saint in his poem "Geetha Govindam", mentions how the individual soul kept separated from the Lord, yearns for its re-union and how this is accomplished through the recommendation of a spiritual intermediary. The 24 verses of this hymn is in Sanskrit and Sri Krishna revealed His form to him to approve its contents.

Jayadeva, the poet, was a manifestation of Sage Vyasa who obtained mental peace, only after he had completed the Bhagavatham in which a sizeable portion portrays details about Krishna's incarnation. Verses from the Geetha Govindam (also known as Ashtapadi) form part of the Bhajan tradition even now. As Jayadeva, born in Orissa (near Puri), composed and sang the verses, his wife used to dance in Divine ecstasy. Once he was not very happy about the structure and the sentiment expressed in one of the verses. When he went out for his bath, the Lord, in his absence, came and restored the verse thereby giving His seal of approval. On his return, Jayadeva was thrilled that Krishna had come in person and blessed his wife with the privilege of witnessing Him in human form.

Sri R. Aravamudan in his Harikatha said, the first verse of the Ashtapadi refers to all the 10 Divine incarnations. As his songs became popular, the king, who too was a composer, became jealous but God appeared in his dream to tell him how Jayadeva's work soaked in devotion, was superior. The bard was once pushed into a well by robbers but was saved by Divine intervention though he was crippled in the process. For their misconduct, the same group of bandits were punished by being buried in a chasm but Jayadeva appealed to God to resuscitate them. The tradition of chanting His names and praise through "Bhajans" and "Sankirtan" continued in Tamil Nadu through saints like Narayana Theertha, Bodhendra, Sadasiva Brahmendra and Thyagaraja.

June 14, 1997

God indwells in His creations 10.30

Under certain exigencies, like facing virtual extinction, a devotee may take a vow to observe a stringent measure of austerity to come out of the situation. Answering his appeal. god is sure to save him. Subsequently the devotee may forget to carry out his resolve but the Lord will remind him by some means. God knows what transpires in the mind of every creation as He is an indweller in each one of them. Scriptural testimony points out that all our actions are noticed by 14 celestial witnesses.

While a scholar eager to meet his wife was crossing a river, half-way through, there were flash floods, which at a particular stage were about to drown him. As taking a vow to become a monk (sanyasi) at the last stage of one's life will enable one to get salvation, despair prompted the scholar to become a sanyasi. He was saved from the peril and then was able to reach his spouse's house.

Believing that his act was known to none but himself, he met his wife, who however found a great change in him and saw him in the garb of an anchorite. Confessing the circumstances under which he had pleaded with God, he left her. This devotee later became a saint, Narayana Theertha, who migrated from his birthplace in Guntur to a place in the Cauvery basin.

He settled in Varahur, composed a poem which chronicled all the episodes in Lord Krishna's life as contained in the Srimad Bhagavatam. For having violated his own resolve, he was punished to suffer from colic pain which vanished as he submitted his prayers to Lord Venkatachalapathi at his place of permanent stay. Not only was he directed to reach Varahur, God ordered him to contribute the hymn with

a direction that the verses should be suited not only to be sung but also be lyrically superb for dance. The Lord Himself gave His approval to these songs called Krishna Leela Tharangini. They are extensively handled in the Bhajan tradition.

In his Harikatha, Kalyanapuram Sri Aravamudan said saints at times performed miracles not for demonstrating their spiritual powers but only to remove the doubt in some diehards about God's supremacy. Saints have revelled in glorifying the Lord's sports as Krishna because He is easy to be approached and performed the duty of an Acharya and also assumed the roles of a cowherd boy, a messenger and a charioteer, which are considered menial. The episodes covered by the saint mention the consequences of displaying one's powers before God and men remaining ungrateful after receiving various benefits from Him.

November 8, 1997

Purandaradasa's renunciation and redemption 11.1

Wealth that has come to one's hands must be rededicated for service to God Himself even as water from a reservoir absorbed by the cloud is returned to the same source. The process of developing detachment is however very difficult. Purandaradasa, an eclectic mystic of the 15th century, discarded his entire fortune at the age of 30 to preach the message of God through his music. God revealed Himself before him saving him in a crisis, once again demonstrating that the Almighty would never fail to protect His devotee.

In his discourse Sri Mannargudi Sambasiva Bhagavathar said a diamond setter by profession, Purandaradasa accumulated enormous wealth through miserly habits. In the form of an old man God sought from him monetary help for his son's Upanayanam. When there was no response from him, the old man approached his wife and obtained her nose screw and took it away to be sold. When the mystery was cleared, the merchant regretted his past life, renounced his riches, became a disciple of a great spiritual leader and poured out through his music Panduranga's glory.

Purandaradasa's musical pieces - ranging from simple-structured Geetams like "Kereyeneeranu" to philosophy-saturated kirtanas, emit devotional fervour. In one he says there is no use reciting the Bhagavad Gita without acting according to the codes contained therein nor is the observance of religious rites by women of any value when they show disrespect to their husbands.

December 17, 1963

Thukaram's ecstasy in songs 11.2

A devotee who has dedicated himself completely to God will not like to be distracted from the ecstasy of singing His glory and chanting His names. Imbued as he is with the firm faith that the Lord will take care of his interests, he will be content with what comes his way. If however, he is compelled by the pressure of circumstances to seek a job for fulfilling his family obligations, he will do so, but only to the extent absolutely necessary. His preference will be for a position that is not detrimental to his way of life as a Bhakta. Thukaram was therefore supremely happy when he was offered by a landlord the job of protecting his crops from foraging birds without having to give up the singing of devotional hymns. He regarded it as an act of the Lord's mercy.

In his discourse Sri Haridas said Thukaram's Bhajan, instead of scaring the birds away, attracted them to the fields and he was struck by the salutary habit of the feathered creatures of not going in search of prey when they were not hungry. Of bundle of sugarcane sticks Thukaram received as part of his wages, only two were left on reaching home, as he gave them away to children of the village. To his annoyed wife, he said it was perhaps the Lord's wish that they should not aspire for or acquire more than what was absolutely needed.

Jealous of the growing popularity of Thukaram, a man of authority in the village insulted and even assualted him but he endured the humuliation, attributing it to his fate, as probably, it was a penalty he had to pay for seeking employment, thereby deviating from the service of God.

January 13, 1971

Thukaram's prayer and precept 11.3

Faith sustains the universe. It is possible for anyone to remain a householder discharging his obligations and yet be in constant touch with the Infinite by cultivating the spirit of detachment, meditating on God and visualising Him at all times. The edifice of Bhakthi should be built on the solid foundation of Virakthi. This can be achieved by association with saints who will teach us how to separate the chaff from the grain. The devotee should endeavour to enshrine God within his heart and imprison Him by binding His lotus feet with the cord of dedication. God responds to His devotee's call in two ways - by depriving him of all his wealth and immersing him in grief or by providing him with all affluence, but making him lead a detached life. A sincere devotee will bear no ill will towards others, will eschew egoism, remain balanced in pleasure and pain, be ever content and be devoid of all cravings. The example of Thukaram, a walking chapel of God spreading His Gospel, reminds us of the characteristics of a suppliant. His prayer was to keep him ever in the company of virtuous men. He proved that in Kaliyuga, the spontaneous utterance of God's names even amidst family chores is an easy, safe and sure method to realise god. Everyone is entitled to practise Nama Sankirtana.

Swami Bhadragiri Keshavadas in his discourse said at times, difficulties serve as a blessing in disguise and help a person to obtain spiritual enlightenment and Tukaram's wife virtually drove him nearer God. As a forlorn child lost in the formidable forest of Samsara, seeking God's asylum, he submitted that he possessed no wisdom, knew no scriptures and was whipped by ego. To him, Panduranga emerged from the stone image.

March 10, 1972

Special privilege of man 11.4

The human being is specially privileged as he is endowed with the greatest power-of thinking and acting properly. Using this mighty weapon, of intellectual capacity with care, he can equip himself with knowledge that will fetch him Divine bliss. God Himself has shown the way by placing before him the required material for spiritual wisdom. If one does not avail of this golden opportunity, it only reflects one's misfortune. But one should be extremely careful in choosing the texts, which contain the truth and whose authorship carries authority. He must also approach an exponent who can bring out the hidden philosophic tenets.

An outstanding classic in Sanskrit is Rukminisa Vijaya, of Sri Vadiraja Swami, the great Madhwa saint, considered a spiritual offering to the Supreme. An epitome of Srimad Bhagavatham this work is a blend of elegance and originality. Consisting of over 1,200 verses spread through 19 cantos, the mahakavya was contributed as a challenge to the work of another great poet (Sisupala Vadha). Studying this text, experts recognised the genius behind it and acclaimed the poet.

Sri Krishnacharya Khed in a discourse explained how the opening prayer itself gave a glimpse of the poetical insight of the saint. The tenth canto was filled with many peculiar doctrines from Madhwa's philosophy. The story deals with Sri Krishna's exploits and how He married Sri Rukmini.

October 18, 1975

Golden era in theism 11.5

The appearance of Sri Madhwacharya (1238-1317 AD) marked a golden era in the history of Indian theism and the Bhakthi movement. It was a period of Vedantic renaissance and a grand hour in Indian spiritual and religious life. Sri Mahdwa's manifestation was a Divine drama and not a chance occurance. This great leader was commissioned to set right the wavered behaviour of men who were led astray from the right path by the glamour of modern civilisation and the ideologies of the permissive society. In all his three incarnations as Hanuman. Bhima and Madhwa, Lord Vayudeva had the only objective of serving the Supreme Being. As Hanuman, he enshrined God in his heart (Bhavo Nanyatra Gachati). As Bhima, he routed anti-God elements. As Madhwa, born near Udipi, he mastered the scriptures and retired to Badrikashrama to dedicate Gita Bashya and obtained instructions from Veda Vyasa to compose the Brahmasutra Bashya. He was asked to preach God's utterances to the distracted humanity in spite of his unwillingness to work in a hostile environment.

In a lecture Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao said the Acharya, travelled widely, wrote 37 works, established the idol of Sri Krishna at Udipi and organised its round of worship 16 times a day by eight Bala Sanyasis, each for two months in the first instance (later changed to two years). The icon, matchless for its transcendent loveliness and ineffable beauty is being adored continuously for the past 700 years. Sri Madhwacharya asked his disciples to follow the behest of the Upanishads. An account of his last glorious days is contained in "Sumadhwa Vijaya". (1008 verses in 16 cantos) a biography by Narayana Panditachar.

January 25, 1977

Influence of saints 11.6

Saints influence their disciples in an unobtrusive and ineffable manner. Their sole mission in life is to forgive our foolish ways and make us return to God. Living in their very company will prove an antidote in an age of attrition like ours. It is through them that Divine light filters down into the world of darkness. Being channels of spiritually, the world will be a blind place but for their presence. They provide us faith and confidence in an hour of crisis and inspire hope in us when we have doubts. When we are lost in resentment and haste, they call us back to the path of love and service. They may be gentle but are never weak; appear determined but are not aggressive. They keep us pure and disinfected.

Sri Raghavendra, one of the greatest of Madhwa saints, represented the most outstanding elements of "Adwaita" philosophy by his works and pious life. He combined in himself several excellences, immense popularity, phenomenal erudition, an author of distinction, subtle grammarian and a fine player on veena. Appreciating his scholarship. Sudhindra Thirtha desired to ordain him as his successor Pontiff. Tradition records that Saraswati appeared in Sri Raghavendra's dream and asked him to serve the cause of Indian philosophy through his commentaries on Sri Madhwa's works and those of his successors, JayaThirtha and Vyasaraja. Taking Sanyasa when he was 23, Sri Raghavendra turned a missionary and lived an austere life presiding over the Math (Kumbakonam) for four decades.

In his discourse Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao said Sri Raghavendra was a noted socio-spiritual benefactor of the distressed humanity and had performed unparalleled miracles He had provided word-by-word meaning to nine of the Upanishads, helpful even to an average reader. His another notable contribution was a book on the daily religious duties one should do. He

vanished into the void but had declared he would continue to be present in his astral body for 700 year. His Brindavan (cemetery) in Manthralaya (near Adoni) is a place of pilgrimage, and his disciples believe that he continues to confer boons on them.

August 31, 1977

How spiritual leaders train disciples 11.7

Any one can overcome the hurdles in life if he is able to condition his mind. The chief concern of spiritual leaders will be to train their disciples to cultivate detachment by impressing on them that problems have to be faced, and what God has ordained shall take place, though a few may try to feel they can circumvent the course of events by their ingenuity. By securing the advice of such saints and preceptors, one will be able to develop tolerance. While taking the disciples, the masters may put their mettle to test behaving at times seemingly harsh but this is intended to make them stand the trials, treating pleasure and pain alike. Because of their attitude, the saints, during their life time, were rediculed and maligned but their greatness was known at the time of their exit from the world. The worth of such God-men may not have been openly acclaimed, even as a person living on the banks of the river Ganga permanently, will not take a dip in it, but prefer water from a street tap. One of the mystics of Maharashtra, Saint Gnaneshwar, suffered such abuses, but he gave the common man the most sacred book in Marathi spiritual literature, a lucid and illuminating commentary on Bhagavad Gita, called Ghyaneswari.

Swami Haridhas Giri said the saint, one of the greatest devotees of Panduranga Vittala, had given a faithful translation

of the Gita (in Sanskrit) in his Marathi version about 700 years ago. Having spread the gospel of the Almighty, Gnaneshwar desired to shed his mortal coils even at a very young age. The decision was conveyed to an other illustrious bard, Namadev, by God Himself through an incorporeal voice, and he rushed to Alandi, the place where the former was preparing to enter samadhi.

September 8, 1977

Songs of Madhwa bards had direct appeal to masses 11.8

"Daasa Koota" (servants and minstrels of God), were a band of chosen men responsible for the awakening of spiritual consciousness among the masses a few centuries ago and who activated them in a quicker way and period than saints well-versed in Sanskrit, who preached God's message through their writings. The songs of these bards had a direct appeal to the average man because the parables and examples quoted therin were drawn from daily occurences. These compositions in Kannada touched the very heart, stimulated the mind, enlarged the vision and converted even the degenerate into an ardent devotee. The Daasa Koota's verses also enriched the Kannada literature. One among the distinguished singer-saints of the 17-18th century of this Madhwa tradition, commencing from Purandaradasa, was Vijayadasa. Like Raghavendra, he was a victim of chill penury and suffered the pangs of agony even while young and went to Varanasi to earn and discharge the debts of his ancestors. But grief did not affect his spiritual pursuits and in this task, he was inspired by his mother.

In his discourse, Sri N. Nagaraja Rao said, the saint, commanded by Purandaradasa in a dream, composed over

25,000 soul-stirring songs, declaring the supremacy of Lord Narayana and the greatness of Sri Madhwa, displaying the spirit of a servant before his master. The songs of Daasas were not merely musically excellent but proclaimed the attributes, glory and exploits of God. Purandaradasa gave him the insignia (mudra or Ankita) of "Vijaya Vittala" His compositions were technically perfect set to the canons of Carnatic music. They explained the difficult doctrines of Madhwa philosophy in clear Kannada language, Vijayadasa said, for instance, that by the grace of God, a tiger could be turned into a mouse, a jackal made a hen, and the influence of Kali (who afflicts the present era) could be effaced. In his village (Chikalaparavi), near Guntakal, on a sacred space specially dedicated to Vijayadasa, the tambura used by him and the manuscripts of his songs are being worshipped on a specific day in the month of "Karthika".

December 3, 1977

Madhwacharya's pathway to God 11.9

God is the sanctuary of those who travel wearily in the path of worldly existence. He protects all those who seek it from Him through intense devotion. His chief aim is to fulfill the aspirations of devotees. Under such comforting and confidence-inspiring circumstances, a devotee need not despair of his sojourn in this material world. The eradication of internal enemies like passion and anger is a sine quo non to the act of dedication to the Lord. Only, He can grant Moksha (total liberation). His benign grace directed towards a devotee puts an end to the vicious circle of metempsychosis in which the latter is caught and brings about redemption. All the Sastras that Madhwarcharya laboured at and the essence of his philosophy

are contained in his devotional-poetry, the Dwadasastotra, recited even today in every Madhwa household during worship at the time of offering the "neivedya". The hymn, composed in different metres, lends itself to musical rendering.

In his discourse in Sri Khed Krishnachar, said in two chapters of the Dwadasastotra, Madhwacharya has referred to the 10 incarnations of the Lord and in another had extolled the Divine Mother Sri Lakshmi. Sri Madhwa asserts that the world of sentient entities cannot but be under the control of an intelligent Being and its reality is not all empirical but absolute. The entire gamut of ordinary beings is regulated by an unalterable settled hierarchy. While Madhwa was performing his oblations on the sea shore (west coast), a merchant ship caught in a storm was being tossed. It was quelled by his prayers and for this act, he was given presents but he chose a block of "Gopichandana" which when split, brought forth an idol of Lord Krishna. Sri Madhwa cleansed it and installed it at Udupi. This is the icon being worshipped even now by eight Bala-sanyasis by turns. The hymn in praise of the Lord, incorporates profound religious truths. Sri Madhwa has not only given the goal of life but has also shown the way to reach it.

April 27, 1978

Do your duty and offer it to God 11.10

Living amidst confusion the modern man experiences a crisis, resulting from a total loss of faith in religion and moral values. He becomes a psychological captive, blind to all things which transcend the confines of his sense horizon. He fails to realise that the empirical goals of life - power, pleasure, affluence and success - are not the ends which will

satisfy him totally. To escape boredom and inanity, he flies into undesirable regions.

A philosopher who was wandering reached a public park. A sentry asked him who he was and why he was there "I wish I know it" was the reply, which exactly reflects the plight of man. It is in this context that saints and sages have come to live in our midst, and suggest methods to secure us relief, Sri Madhwacharya bemoans the state of existence of the un-regenerate man and beckons him to cultivate faith in God.

In a discourse, Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao said Sri Madhwa reiterates the Gita doctrine of "Swadharma" discrediting a life of laziness. He insists that one should perform one's duties as an offering to God. While so doing, one should regard himself as an instrument or agent of God. According to him, it is not enough for one to contemplate the Lord, seeking individual salvation unmindful of the social agonies of fellow beings.

Sri Madhwacharya, founder of the Dwaita philosophy, says that God does not create the world once, leaving it to its destiny as the deists hold. He is the continuing cause of all the activities of man and movement in matter. He is the Foreman who runs the machines that we are. The purpose of creation by the Lord is to enable individual souls to work out their salvation. He prescribes "Bhakti" as the supreme method to attain the Lord.

The worship of the Almighty should be conducted in a proper manner. Sri Madhwacharya pleads with us to lead a life of purity as this will enable us to meditate on the Supreme Being. Devotion and duty import meaning into human life and infuse purpose into it.

October 9, 1981

Knowledge, devotion are means to Moksha 11.11

Devotion (Bhakti) is the continuous flow of love unto God, mingled with the knowledge of the Almighty's glory. It should be deep-rooted and steadfast in the face of thousands of obstacles. The outward symbols of devotion, include listening and singing His praise, rendering service at His feet and knowing Him as our eminent Lord and surrendering all our belongings.

Knowledge and Devotion alone are the means to secure "Moksha". In Srimad Bhagavatam, the demoness Putana is described as having obtained "Liberation" by administering poison to the Lord in the child-form. This may appear to run counter to admitted truth, because if the gift of poison was the means, there may be no need then for vows, austerities and penance prescribed in scriptural texts.

Sri Madhwacharya solved this by stating that in her body, two souls existed - one gave poison and went to hell and the other suckled the Divine child and was freed from a curse. This is the doctrine of dwelling of two souls, - Divine and the other devilish, - in one and the same body of a person, dominating it alternately, resulting in doing good and wicked deeds. In a discourse on the life and teachings of Sri Madhwa, Sri H.Sridhara Acharya said his philosophy - "Dwaita" or Dualism points out that the Supreme Being is Omniscient and Infinite. The individual soul is separate, but owes allegiance to Him. The world is real. There is difference between God, Soul and Matter.

To a king who had doubts about the efficacy of a Vedic dictum which guarantees sprouting, blossoming and bearing fruit from a seed then and there on chanting it, Sri Madhwa

replied that the words of an officer in service have an immediate effect, but not after his retirement. The chanting of Vedas will bear no efficacy if the person is not duly qualified. He proved this by taking some seeds, making them yield fruits by reciting the relevant Vedic passage.

February 19, 1982

Teachings of a saint composer 11.12

Can there be greater foolishness than for a man, standing on the sea-shore, to wait for the waves to completely subside to enable him to take his bath? Equally so will be his fond hope of fulfilling all his family obligations before taking to spiritual pursuits. Man's commitments to his kith and kin will continue in some form or the other. At some stage, he should let himself off from the ties. Such detachment cannot, of course, be developed overnight unless God wills it so. He must take steps in a phased manner to get rid of the shackles which keep him bogged in the quagmire of worldly pleasures. The fleeting happiness that man seems to enjoy is compared to the state of exultation experienced by a lamb which is given a bath and decorated, not aware that it is being readied for sacrifice. One of the saints who gave to the musical world, simple compositions containing high philosophic truths that are still popular, was Purandara Dasa.

In a discourse, Sri G.N. Jayathirthachar referred to the lurking desire in the mind of the Divine-bard Narada to go through family life. God obliged him causing him manifest as a moneylender, avaricious in amassing wealth and ruthless in his ways. God in the guise of a mendicant sought charity from him but was turned out. The businessman's wife, a

great devotee, donated her diamond nose-screw. He chided her for this "extravagance" but found the jewel in his cash-box. The transformation came all on a sudden and he realised Gods sport, discarded his wealth and commenced on a journey, as Purandara Dasa spreading the glory of God through his songs. His only prayer was "Why don't you take me forthwith as your servant". No one should waste his life - a precious gift of the Almighty conferred only on a few privileged but seek His feet, he preached.

February 4, 1987

Lure of money causes grief 11.13

A saint of the 14th century, after fulfilling God's command, had his peaceful, final sleep. His body was kept covered with a cloth. There was controversy whether it should be cremated or buried because he was believed to be a Muslim preaching Lord Rama's message. As the quarrel persisted, an incorporeal voice asked the parties to remove the cloth. To their surprise, there was only a flower there, which the groups divided, and on them arose a temple and a mosque.

The Saint, Kabirdas, is considered the manifestation of Suka and he stood as the symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity. His famous song referred to the Hindus calling God as "Alakniranjan" while Muslims terming Him as "Ya-Khuda". The Hindus usually cremated the body while latter buried it, when it turns respectively, into ash and mud. Can anyone at a later stage distinguish the Hindu dust and the Muslim earth? "Forget the animosity and sing about Sita-Ram", Kabir advised the clans.

Swami Kesavadas in a discourse said Kabir's songs are full of philosophic import and truths about the Reality. "People rush after happiness which eludes them. The process brings misery. Lure of the money and lust push them into grief. But if they 'loot' the imperishable kingdom of Lord Rama, they can become the wealthiest. I am a beggar but am now the richest since I robbed the Nama-Bhandara, the treasury of God's names", Kabirdas said.

An orphan, he was brought up by a Muslim couple. Thrice when the parents opened the holy book, they came across the word Kabir, meaning, "The greatest". He was initiated by a Hindu saint, Ramananda, under strange circumstances. As the saint was returning from his ablutions in the Ganga in the early hours, young Kabir prostrated on the stone step. The feet of the guru touched the boy's head and he was "enlightened". Immediately he burst into exuberance: "The dust of the Guru's acts as a collyirium to find out the hiding Lord Rama in our hearts". He had a doubt about the process involved in grinding foodgrain. He was told that the stone that rotated on the top represented the sky and the base, the earth and the grain, all creations.

February 12, 1987

Attaining Salvation amid mundane life 11.14

The entire Indian atmosphere has always been suffused with the aroma of spiritually. The concept of religion pervades everywhere and even the uneducated and unsophisticated women can act as Divine messengers. The obedient, but slightly

overbearing wife of a devotee, who renounced the world and went into seclusion, asked him, while attending to his basic food needs, whether God is to be found only in the woods or the mountains. Will He not reveal Himself, in the homes where His names are chanted, she raised a doubt. The devotee got illumined and realised the truth and preached to the entire humanity that "Nama Sankirtana" - uttering God's attributes - can be undertaken by all people, at all times and at any place. There are no frontiers of caste or creed and no restriction of any kind, except that the devotee should be deeply committed to Bhakti. This was the message given by Saint Thukaram, whose "Abhangs" (devotional compositions) stirred mankind.

In a discourse, Swami Keshavadas said the gifts offered by emperor Shivaji and numerous others to Thukaram used to be freely distributed by him, which annoyed his wife. "When God protects the entire universe, will He forget my needs? In the crevice of a rock in a deep well a small toad is being taken care of - who does it? Animals and birds do not store food, but do they not thrive? Why should a man carry his luggage on his head while travelling in a vehicle? Every detail for man's survival has been worked out by the Lord", he told her. (This corresponds to the Lord's message "Yogakshemam Vahamyaham). There is no need for a householder to renounce the world. He can remain in the midst of his family and yet offer his prayers and surrender to God.

Two scholars challenged Thukaram whether God would come to the rescue if all his "Abhangs" were thrown into the river, presuming that this would not happen as the Saint, in their opinion, was a "lowborn". For 13 days, Thukaram who accepted the challenge, prayed intensely cringing before the Lord: "I am your servant and you are my protector". All the manuscripts, containing the 24,000 hymns, were brought back safe to the surface without a trace of water

on them owing to Divine intervention. Thukaram was forthwith informed by a mysterious voice that he could come to the abode of God within eight days. He called everyone to accompany him to Vaikunta, but no one was prepared as they offered some excuse or the other. They were keen to go to Heaven, but not to die. The saint's body levitated slowly and at the auspicious time, uttering the words, "Panduranga Vittala", he attained salvation.

February 13, 1987

Luminaries of Madhwa philosophy 11.15

The world revolves inaudibly by the spirit of the illumined souls. These saints impart light during darkness and provide strength when we are weak. Their conduct is consecration. They act as channels through which spiritually flows. During 15th, 16th century lived two eminent religious guides - Vadiraja and Vyasaraja. Luminaries in the philosophic thought of Indian theism, they spread the glory of God.

Sri Vadiraja was an author of a dozen original works and of several commentaries in Saskrit, Kannada and Tulu. He was the 16th Acharya of the "Sode" Math, one of the eight, established by Sri Madhwacharya in Udupi. He built the Trivikrama temple at Sode and installed the idol of Manjunatha at Dharmasthala. He was responsible for converting the then-existing practice of the eight-monks administering the Sri Krishna temple at Udupi for two months each into two years each (Paryaya). His "Yuktimallika" explains Madhwa Philosophy with clarity. His "Rukminisha Vijaya" is a poetical marvel describing the facts leading to the union of Rukmini

and Lord Krishna. Among his famous hymns is the "Dasavatara Stotram".

In his discourse, Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao referred to the distinction of Sri Vyasaraja (also known as Vyasa Thirtha and Vyasaraya) of having been honoured by four rulers of Vijayanagar empire. He was the patron-saint of Krishnadevaraya. He took to monastic order at the age of 16. He worshipped Lord Venkatesa at Tirumalai for 12 years (1486-1498). Krishnadevaraya performed "Ratnabhisheka" for the Saint in 1526 AD and gifted a village.

During a dreaded period called "Kuhayoga", which meant death for the ruler, the Saint assumed responsibility of occupying the throne, thus saving Krishnadevaraya. The Saint who reigned supreme over the philosophic empire for six decades, died in 1539 and his mortal remains are enshrined in a tomb on the banks of the Thungabhadra. He composed soul-stirring songs in Kannada to awaken the masses from the drooping faith. He gave to the world two illustrious disciples - Purandaradasa and Kanadakasa - who kindled the knowledge of the massess in God. Guru, Dharma and Duty.

March 24, 1987

God transcends caste factors 11.16

Can anyone identify God as belonging to any particular caste? Does the "soul" which He creates and is permanent has any community? The Almighty can decide and act according to His will and confer boons on men or deprive them of their possessions and mortals have to submit to His commands.

God's devotees belong to different castes and He never considers the same a criterion in extending His mercy. Several saints have been born in the so-called backward classes but they have stood as symbols of true devotion and absolute detachment.

God is never partial. But He may choose some men to spread His message of Love and Truth. One among them was Kanakadasa. A local chieftain under a ruler of Karnataka, he was charged with the task of holding the torch of devotion by turning a Haridasa (servant of God), go about singing compositions containing God's merciful qualities and deeds and make people cultivate detachment. But Kanakadasa refused saying that he was not duly qualified, that he had no spiritual knowledge and that he hailed from a low caste. God saw to it that he became a messenger after forcing him go through severe tests and ordeals.

Sri V.S. Venkatramana Rao in a discourse referred to the treasure that Kanakadasa struck and the temple he erected for Adikesava utilising the amount. There was protest from the orthodox sections of people against his devotional activities but later they revised their views. God even deprived Kanakadasa of his kith and kin and property but he still resisted God's invitation. Ultimately, he yielded to God's directive when, thrown off from a horse on the battlefield and he lay unconscious, he was revived by Divine touch. It was a re-birth for him.

In one of his songs with 24 "Charanams", Kanakadasa pours out his deep mental anguish. Under God's order, he worshipped Lord Srinivasa in Tirumalai where he submitted a strange request to the deity: "I must see you perform a dance, to the song rendered by Anjaneya, the rhythm maintained by Lord Siva and Brahma playing the drum". Kanakadasa was blessed by Vyasaraja and Purandaradasa.

March 15, 1989

Divine choice to guide humanity 11.17

A saint who is often chosen by the Almighty to guide humanity is considered as a "living God". Saints are real benefactors because by their very presence even without associating themselves with the happenings around, they are in a position to extend solace to tormented souls.

"To think of the lives of saints, to live in their company, to have the good fortune of seeking their advice and to draw inspiration from the way they strictly adhere to spiritual directrives, is to draw forth upon yourself, a shower of purity and Divine consciousness", says Swami Sivananda.

The Maharashtra State has produced some of the most illustrious saints who spread God's message through their intense devotion. This caravan of saints hailed from different castes and strata but these trifles did not concern them. They remembered God at all times and under all circumstances. The manner in which a saint meditated on the glorious form of God totally forgetting his "Self" which resulted in the loss of his child was narrated in a discourse on "Bhaktha Vijayam" by Swami Vimalananda.

A potter by profession, Gora Kumbhar derived extreme bliss ever retaining God's vision in his heart. Even while manufacturing pots and other mud vessels, he was singing the glory of God thereby remaining blissful, but oblivious to the world. He forgot all about his body while his soul ever rested at the feet of God. In time of ecstasy, he was totally unaware of what was going about around.

One day, when Gora Kumbhar was mad with joy, chanting the names of God, his child crawled out of the cradle and came near the potter's wheel. Not aware of its presence, Gora Kumbhar trampled upon the baby crushing it to death. Its

flesh torn to shreds, got mixed with the wet clay. People who gathered cursed him and his mad devotion. Even at this stage, he continued to recite the holy names.

When he realised what had happened. Gora Kumbhar prayed to God. A miracle did take place and Lord Panduranga showered His grace on him by handing over the child with life and it landed on the hands of the devotee. People who had earlier scoffed at his attitude bordering on total foolishness, came to know the value of dedicating oneself to God. Many flocked to him. The lives of such saints constantly remind us of our religious duties and how we should cling to God tendering our surrender.

July 14, 1989

Noble trait of feeding the poor 11.18

Charity takes the first place among the services to be rendered to God. It is a task entrusted to us by God. Among various types of spending his wealth, a person gets the highest praise for feeding the poor. This act should not mean that he can satisfy the needs of his relatives and claim that he has done a signal sacrifice. The beneficiaries should be those who starve and are anxious to get satisfied with just a morsel.

When a lump of sugar is left on the floor, we can see thousands of ants collecting to share it. Crows too feed together when something to set is found. But man is essentially selfish and he does not usually spend on noble deeds.

A rich man was once accosted by a beggar and when the former chased him out, the latter said that he was reduced to this present position because of his arrogance in his previous birth when he too hated the poor. Also one should not injure the sentiments of these have-nots by asking them not to roam about idling their time.

The life of Saint Ramadas of Bhadrachalam stands as an example for others. He spent his entire wealth taking delight in alleviating the sufferings of the poor by giving them food. When he had nothing more left he firmly believed that the Lord would come to his help, His wife reminded him that he should also put in his efforts. He then went to the ruler and obtained a job of revenue collections.

Sri Burra Sivaramakrishna Sarma in a discourse said Andhra could take pride in having produced three saints, Pothana, Thyagaraja and Gopanna. Kabir initiated Gopanna into the realms of spiritually even when the latter was young and gave him the name of "Ramadas". His devotion was so intense that while listening to a dissertation on the Ramayanam when the scene of the construction of the bridge across Sethu was being described, he was seen shedding tears of joy, his mind having gone back to thousands of years.

Even as the body is cleansed of dirt and sweat by taking baths in sacred rivers, the mind is flushed out of impurities by reciting the names of God. While functioning as a government employee. Ramadas utilised the State funds to construct the temple in Bhadrachalam. As the money was not replenished, he was detained for embezzlement but Lord Rama his personal deity, repaid the cash and made the ruler release him from custody.

January 11, 1990

Manifestation of Divine love 11.19

Devotion to God flowers into several varieties. Among those who wish to discard worldly pleasures and reach God's abode, some treat Him with reverance, wondering whether He is approachable at all. There are mystical personalities who place themselves as brides and the Lord as the bridegroom

and display their concern of remaining separated, ever craving for early reunion. Such rare devotees know that worldly attachment and dedication to God cannot go together.

In turn, God feels that His only duty is to await the call of those persons in distress, rush to their rescue and provide instantaneous relief. One of the basic methods of inculcating spiritual discipline is to train children and make them listen to God's powers and His qualities of mercy and grace. The parents, who alone are genuinely interested in their wards, will tender proper advice but at times it may be unpalatable. It will do them good in the long run and make them worthy citizens.

Listening to the devotional lectures when glorious episodes connected with God were being narrated and imagining the small idol of Lord Krishna presented to her as having "life", a young girl developed so much of attachment to it that she kept it with her forever. She used to converse with the same and draw comfort. This was the girl who later grew up to be the famed devotee - Meera who totally identified herself with Lord Krishna.

In a discourse, Sri B. Sivaramakrishna Sarma said, Meera married a ruler much against her wish. She was made to face several problems but took them as God's work and tackled them with a smile. Her mother-in-law herself hated her because Meera worshipped Sri Krishna in preference to Lord Siva. She caused another woman to spy her activities and sowed the seeds of discord and suspicion in the mind of Meera's husband. Her religious congregations used to attract even the then king. After sometime, Meera's husband realised that she was a messenger of God and helped her to pursue her Divine work and even built a temple for the Lord she adored. Meera used to go into raptures by rendering devotional songs praising "Giridhar Gopal". Ultimately, Meera settled in

Brindavan, a place connected with the Lord's younger days and merged with Him, providing yet another proof that God never fails but helps His devotees, who have deep faith in Him, to achieve success.

January 12, 1990

Shastras to be followed in temple construction 11.20

Though God has not been seen by ordinary human beings, His different forms, as He resides in heaven or when He manifested in the world to save the virtuous from the attacks by the wicked, have been portrayed by saints and sages in their literacy masterpieces as He had revealed His vision to them - directly or in other ways. His glorious features have been presented to humanity as idols installed in temples.

Apart from the religious purpose they serve, the idols are not made from ordinary granites. The texts on sculpture spell out the nature of the stones to be chosen. There are three types, each identified by tapping them, judging the sound and by their weight. The male stones are used for chiselling the idols, the female ones to form their base and the neuters, to be used as the "steps". The icons also require great care while being cast.

The details connected with the construction of temples (the nature of the soil, directions, etc.) the selection of the stones, of metals and other procedures connected with their installation have been presented to us by Acharya Sri Madhwa in one of his works called Tantrasara. In a discourse explaining the contents of this rare text, Sri B.E. Nagendraprasad said

the book's contents deal with the correct method of respiration adopted while conducting the religious rites, of performing the various sacrifices (Yagnams), including the measurements of the altar, the selection of twigs to be offered to the flames, the deities to be invoked, the honour to be extended to the priest who carries out the purificatory rituals, and about the nature of the incantations and of meditation in these ceremonies, on various forms of deities. The modes of prayers to be offered to the retinue of the Lord have also been discussed. Sri Madhwacharya has enumerated the method of sanctifying the icons, the 16 types of offering worship and the oblations to be given to various presiding deities. The Acharya has given the expansion and the components of the primary mantra (called Pranavam) and the Lord's chief sublime characteristics.

March 13, 1991

Time-table for daily religious routine 11.21

For man's safe journey through life, our seers and saints have prescribed a schedule of duties, daily and compulsory, which when performed with sincerity and as acts of dedication to God, will fetch a man the moral strength to withstand the impact of even powerful influences.

Carried out to show his gratitude to God for His mercy, these religious exercises will set the aspirant on the path of Liberation, which should be the goal of right-thinking sections of humanity. Even as giant machines will remain idle when electricity fails, so too when the Lord's grace is not sought, man's life becomes purposeless. Man is called upon to perform his duties at all times. If they are done without

acknowledgement to God, they will become non-productive here and hereafter: they may also lead a person to netherworld.

To educate his followers, Sri Madhvacharya has written a work called "Sadaachara Smriti", based on Vyasa's mightier treatise on the subject. From the time a devoted individual rises from bed till he retires for the day, a time-table has been worked out and suitable directions given therein. No one is exempt from these injunctions and by discharging these pious obligations, a person can show the correct way for others to follow, Sri B.E.Nagendraprasad explained in a discourse, analysing the subjects dealt with in this great work by Sri Madhvacharya.

Even though one knows the role of water, flowers and Salagramams (stone-like idols), the background for their proper use in worship have been told in the Smriti. Man should not feel that his duty ends with the performance of daily worship to icons. Since the Lord resides in the hearts of everyone, his aim should be to visualise that Divine form in all others. The reading of scriptures and teaching them to others too constitute a noble sacrifice. Sri Madhvacharya lived strictly in accordance with the commands, which have the support of sages who were well-versed about God's forms, traits and nature.

April 18, 1991

Significance of idol worship 11.22

A detailed account of the purpose which an idol, installed with due consecration, serves, the material with which it is made and the mode of performing worship and all other factors which go to revere this replica of the Lord as He

resides in Heaven, have been presented by a great spiritual leader in one of his masterily works. Among the 37 mighty contributions by Sri Madhwacharya, the "Tantra Saara Sangraha" will fetch benefits to a devotee and will shower on him, Bliss, here and hereafter.

Sri Sathyapramoda Thirtha of Uttaradhi Math in a discourse pointed out that Madhwacharya's philosophy is not idolatrous. At the time of consecration, the powers of the deity to be worshipped, have to be invoked and infused into the idol, through the chanting of the Mantras. A devotee is not expected to worship an idol made of gold or any other metal, bought from a shop. Consecration is necessary to ensure sanctity. The Tantra Saara Sangraha gives a devotee, as many as 72 Mantras, each one assigned to a deity. Uttered with devotion, every one of them will give secular and spiritual benefactions.

A valid scripture, the Tantra Saara Sangraha projects the glory of the Lord. The fruit of upholding the directives given there in, is Salvation. A question may be asked whether a work of this nature written by a saint (in flesh and blood) can serve as an authority. This work is but a shortened text of Vyasa's bigger one. The author has a complete comprehension of the subject he presents, and desires that the contents be of use to devotees. The Acharya is the beloved of God. He is anxious to impart knowledge to his disciples.

April 24, 1991

Auspicious traits that are inimitable 11.23

God has been glorified and His gifts to humanity have been extolled by saints in different ways. They drew inspiration from the scriptural authority made available to them. The

unique feature of the teachings of Sri Madhwacharya is that the Lord is the only one who is independent and He alone is all-in-all. God's infinite attributes cannot be downgraded or belittled. He does not need the help of any in respect of His existence and activity. God is not an indeterminate, indefinable, vague spiritual substance, devoid of all predicates. He is the home of all auspicious qualities. When He is described as a "person", He should not be compared with a human being. There is no difference between the Lord and His several incarnations. He is full of knowledge, power and love. The souls are creatures, God being the creator.

Sri Madhwacharya has left people in no doubt about the eternal relation of their dependence on God. The Lord reveals Himself to the devotees in various measures, according to their spiritual eligibility. The God of Sri Madhwacharya's philosophy is not a sentimental king nor a ruler who wipes out the sins of all men and save their souls. He has laid down that each soul should work out its moral life and thus prepare to receive the Lord's grace. God is not only Transcendent and immanent but He is the continuing cause. Of his inimitable traits, forbearance, easy accessibility and compassion to everyone are to be categorised as outstanding. Sri Madhwa was charged with the vigorous mission to uplift humanity from the foolish ways and to enable it to walk erect on the path of devotion and service to mankind. He had thus answered the dire needs of his time. Those who have faith in Sri Madhwa's interpretation of the scriptures and knowledge of the limitations of human nature, goodness and perfectability, will not find it hard to believe in his Doctrine. It is difficult to overcome one's true nature, however much one may try. Ravana in the Ramayanam and Duryodhana in the Mahabharatham accept this. The Saint accords a unique status to the Mahabharatha and loves the Bhagavatam as a great Purana, said Sri Sathyapramodha Thirtha in a discourse on the Acharya's philosophy.

May 10, 1991

God will not fail to listen to prayers 11.24

Ardent devotees of God are aware of His munificence towards them and His benevolent gestures. They know of His readiness to come to their help. But some ask whether He can be directly approached or seen. For this, God has deputed some of His aides who, during their stay in this world, perform the roles of spiritual guides. They serve as links between the Almighty and His devotees. They being His trusted assistants, submit the pleas of those who seek the Lord's intervention and the latter will surely respond and grant the requests. For this, these leaders offer worship to their personal deities They can talk and walk with God. That is why great reliance is placed on the spiritual powers they have secured through penance and other austerities. They convey to the devotees the assurance given by God. These Acharya have been handed over idols which were being adored from time immemorial

Sri Raghavendraswami to whom devotees put forward their submissions, will in turn refer them to Lord Rama who will not fail to listen to the prayers. The outstanding feature of Hindu religion is the universal prayer that the entire world all creations (men, animals and birds) should be prosperous, enjoy happiness and experience peace and bliss, said Sri Vidhyadheesha Thirtha Swami (Palimar Math, Udupi) in a lecture.

Another unique feature of Hinduism is that answering devotees' requests, God not only grants them material and secular benefactions but also removes all the stumbling blocks which prevent them from securing their desires and ultimately gives them salvation.

The Acharyas tour extensively taking with them the deities to enable disciples and devotees to offer their worship.

Lord Rama who upheld the Law of Virtue in the wake of challenges, never deviated from the ideals set by the scripture. If human beings follow His example, they can become perfect. Hence, His life should serve as a model. Mortals too can remain unaffected by problems as they would have derived the moral strength through prayers. There need be no doubt about God's protection to devotees. His assurance of ''Refuge'' is certain and unequivocal.

October 16, 1993

Man lives on faith in God 11.25

Man lives on hopes and faith in God. At every stage particularly in modern days, he has to face several risks, hazards and challenges. If he does not have belief that someone unseen is protecting him, he will be worried and thereby suffer mental torture. The air he breathes is polluted and the food he takes may be contaminated. Who protects him from the ill-effects of these factors? Is there safety when he travels? Still he continues his routine, not realising that a superior unseen force takes care of him and the entire humanity.

That unknown, indescribable, supreme authority is called God. Those who repose trust in Him and entrust themselves seeking His protection will he saved while others will get tossed about in life but they too will one day realise that God alone can be their constant companion. Such a deep faith was revealed by a famous saint, totally attached to Lord Rama. He was Kabirdas, whose devotion has few parallels.

Though a poor weaver, Kabir considered himself a lakhier. The lakhs of chants of Rama's names daily were his fortune

and the same could not be stolen from him by anyone. His reputation spread far and wide. Envious of this, a rich man, with an intention to destroy Kabir, once sent out letters to persons all over the country inviting them to participate in a 10 day festival Kabir proposed to conduct. As people thronged, the intensity of reciting the Lord's names increased and everyone forgot about their lunch and dinner because their only thought was fixed on Rama. They never bothered about the meal though another "wealthy" man attended to their boarding and lodging. When the "Festival" concluded, devotees thanked Kabir for his hospitality and for arrangements made for their comfortable stay. Kabir who was all along immersed in Divine ecstasy made a feverish search and could then realise the truth and the "rich man" who had by then disappeared was the Lord. All who took leave of Kabir went into raptures and admired his devotion. "You care for God. He will attend on you".

While human beings cannot offer anything to the Almighty, they can surely surrender themselves at His feet and serve Him with sincerity and to the best of their ability, said Sri Krishna Premi in his Ramayana discourse. The people of Ayodhya left their homes to join Rama on His exile but He advised them to return. Rama possessed admirable traits and was universally loved. If the people of Ayodhya visited temples, it was only to pray for His safety. Rama's character, adherence to discipline, maintenance of integrity, concern for citizens' welfare and His mercy, appealed to everyone.

January 12, 1994

Why God denied elixir to demons 11.26

By no stretch of imagination can God be accused of showing partiality to His own creations. Neither will He be carried

away by praise nor offended by abuses. How then can the episodes in our sacred books be described, as punishing some and protecting others be justified. God is definitely concerned about the welfare of those who have pinned their faith in Him and who carry out His commands sincerely and to whom. He has promised His protection. When such devotees are harassed or disrespected by a few wicked elements. He is definitely upset and He will remove the obstacles on the path of the spiritual progress of such pious men.

On some occasions even the celestials, who should normally uphold the rules of virtue, had displayed their pride and they had been suitably taught a lesson. God had made both the celestials and the demons resort to the churning of the ocean of milk to obtain elixir. But due to certain circumstances, He denied serving it to the latter. A few important messages are to be learnt from this episode. First, in the wake of a danger arising from a common source or an enemy, members of two opposing parties should join hands sinking their differences to face the challenge. In the present day also, when there are attempts to denigrate God and condemn the Vedic practices, those holding different views in regard to the interpretation of the Vedic aphorisms should come together to resist these forces. Saint Vadiraja in his "Yuktimallika" has expressed these sentiments. Secondly, as revealed during the churning, support to the mountain which was sinking was provided by the Almighty from underneath. This only proves that there is a superior unseen power which takes care of us. There may be elaborate complicated machinery to turn out highly sophisticated products but there should be electrical energy to run them. God is like electricity that operates these machines and without Him nothing can take place.

Sri Vishwesha Thirtha Swami in a discourse said, to pinpoint that wealth in the hands of evil forces will be misused

for destructive purposes. Goddess of Wealth, who emerged from the churning process ignoring the praise by all, straight went to the Lord. The virtuous will spend money given by God to beneficial purposes only. The tendency among people is to flock to a man when he enjoys prosperity and to illustrate this, the episode refers to the manner in which those who had joined the churning, were eager to take away the gems and other precious articles but trembled with fear to go near when poison sprang. To save humanity, Lord Siva gulped it. God is ever ready to guide us. He is not somewhere beyond our reach. We can experience Him within us provided we offer Him worship and adopt other religious exercises.

July 19, 1994

Saintly company will curb evil influences 11.27

To those who consider life a burden and hence want to escape pernicious influences, several methods are prescribed in sacred texts to enjoy peace and maintain equanimity. One of the easy steps is to cultivate association with stalwarts with saintly qualities. They distinguish themselves by personal conduct and spiritual powers obtained through austere habits.

Their only mission is to make people turn towards God. Sometimes they perform miracles; these are not intended as a display of their distinction but to bring relief to their disciples. Among such dynamic personalities, Saint Raghavendra embodied in himself complex excellences and bestowed benefits on worshippers.

Nearly four centuries after his departure from the world, people still rally round him, entombed (Brindavan) at Mantralaya, on the banks of the Tungabhadra as he showers socio-spiritual boons and fetches them succor. Venkatanatha, as Raghavendra Swami was known in his pre-sanyasa days, was directed in his dream by Goddess Saraswathi to accept a request by his spiritual mentor for defending the cause of Madhwacharya's philosophy. He took to the monastic order at the age of 25.

Towards the end of his rule over the spiritual kingdom, Sri Raghavendra asked his disciple to erect a 'Brindavana'' at Mantralaya and entered it, with a veena in his hand and an infectious smile on the face. As he exercised control over the respiratory system, the flow of his consciousness stopped. then the Brindavan was closed with a slab of 1200 salagramas. He declared that he would, in his astral body, continue to bless humanity for 700 years. There are over 350 'Brindavans' established all over India. The then Governor of Adoni (a Muslim) assigned the Mantralaya to the saint.

More astounding was a vision of Sri Raghavendra, which the then Madras Governor, Sir Thomas Munro, had. Unable to assimilate the Indian way of life and its sanctity, the British rulers ordered resumption of an Endownment (of Mantralaya) made by the Adoni Nawab. Thomas Munro, a God-fearing official, who was deputed to visit the place, entered the precincts (of Brindavan) with reverence. A saint emerged and told him that if the Jagir was resumed, the place, which was like an oasis quenching the thirst of all parched throats without distinction, would become deserted and go without prayers.

The Jagir was retained, thus proving the glory and Divinity of Sri Raghavendra, said Sri S.R. Raghothamachar in a discourse. "The vision or darshan of the sages cleanses us

of all impurities instantaneously" says Lord Krishna in the Bhagavatam. Living in the company of saints and God's deputies is a balm in this age of attrition.

August 27, 1994

Utterances of saints will come true 11.28

That the utterances of saints, who are none else than God's deputies, are not only carefully weighed but will come true, has been proved through several instances in religious history. Their statements carry great import as they have been spelt out following the acquisition of spiritual powers through intense austerities.

Once a woman prostrated before a spiritual leader who blessed her with a child. She submitted that this was impossible as her husband was old and was in his death bed. There was also a big gap in their ages as she was his second wife. The saint said what he said came out at Lord Krishna's indirect command. He reiterated that a child would certainly be born but imposed a condition that it should be handed over to him to succeed him as the Head of the Monastery. When the couple were stunned, the preceptor told them that they could give the child to him only if it was born outside their house. Divine intervention resulted in the woman delivering a male child, her husband having recovered from his serious illness. The birth was also away from their home. The saint had it kept in a golden platter, giving it the milk that had been offered to the deity he worshipped. The child grew into an intelligent boy and was administered the oath of an ascetic and later became acknowledged as one of the stout exponents of Sri Madhwacharya's philosophy. He was Vyasaraya and

later known as Vyasaraja, controlling a Math in the same name for several years.

Sri Vidya Payonidhi Thirtha, the present head of this Math, explained how Vyasaraja saved the ruler of the Vijayanagar empire (Krishnadevaraya) from coming under the influence of stellar positions which would have resulted in his death. He took upon himself the responsibility of occupying the throne and scaring away the serpent that came to the palace court, by throwing a garment before it which caught fire.

The exponents of the "Daasa" tradition - Purandara and Kanaka were his disciples, who spread divine glory through bhajan and music. Vyasaraja worshipped Lord Srinivasa in Tirumala for 12 years and built the canopy over the sanctum, engraving the figure of "Vimana Venkatesa" on it. This patron saint of Vijayanagar kingdom defended the system of Madhwacharya, using his logical acumen and staggering knowledge. Evidence of his brilliance is seen in his numerous works particularly the Tatparya Chandrika, proving "Hari" is Supreme with auspicious attributes, the world is real and the concept of difference between God, soul and matter. One of the eight fist-fulls of sacred earth brought by Madhwacharya is being retained and worshipped in this Math.

September 1, 1994

Life sans devotion is meaningless 11.29

In a classic explanation of "Devotion" Jayathirtha, an apostle of the Dwaita system, says: "It is the supreme attachment to the Lord on a complete understanding of His greatness and supremacy, which transcends the love of one's own self and possessions and which remains unshaken in the face of innumerable diffculties. It flows uninterruptedly. This kind

of devotion secures salvation''. Sri Madhwacharya, exponent of the system, prescribes devotion as the best method to reach the Lord.

The greatest sin, according to Sri Madhwa, is our identification with the Lord. When God and devotion go out of our lives, we will lose the key to the art of life and we will not know what we are and what our goal is. We may break under life's pressures. It is devotion to God that cements the cracks and gives cohesion, enabling us to face problems. Devotion is necessary for practicing ethical values like self-control, equanimity and withdrawal of senses from worldly objects. It helps us perform our duties. It includes service to humanity.

Sri Madhwa's message is a reiteration and simplification of Lord Krishna's declaration in His Gita that duty and devotion have to be combined. The Acharya adds that the Lord, with all His retinue, should be worshipped because the legion of His dependents constitutes His glory and power.

Sri Vidhya Payonidhi Thirtha, of the Vyasaraja Math in a discourse said Sri Madhwa philosophy is a grand system of metaphysics based on the triple sources of knowledge. God's grace is not whimsical. Sri Madhwa's message, in a nutshell, is: Live a life of contentment experiencing joys and sorrows resulting from your past deeds, in a spirit of Bhakti, in humility and adoration of Sri Hari, the Supreme'. A familiar statement among the followers of Dwaita is that there is no deity equal to ''Madhava'' (or Sri Hari) nor any preceptor equal to 'Madhwa'.

Even half a century ago, all devotees of this outstanding Acharya used to study his 37 works daily, a tradition which has been given up under the impact of modern trends. Saints like Jayathirtha, Vyasaraja and Raghavendra have left a rich scriptural legacy in commentaries and glosses for the Brahmasutras of Vyasa's. Sri Madhwacharya visited Badarikashram

and wrote his Bashya after obtaining Vyasa's. "Grace" is the last word in his philosophy. Bondage, which is real, can be removed by "Grace" through intense, unremitting, exclusive and pure devotion. Real affluence is remembering the Supreme always. His master plan secures us individual well-being as well as human welfare, as we resort to devotion. We are all under the care of the "Just and Wise" providence.

September 24, 1994

Saints guide men to Salvation 11.30

The life of a human being has been best compared to a wayfarer, who gets lost in the midst of a jungle infested with wild beasts and poisonous reptiles threatening to take away his life and inhabited by bandits who tie him to a tree. Night sets in and the path he has to tread cannot be traced. But by Divine grace, another traveller makes his presence from somewhere, removes his bondage and guides him to his goal.

Similarly, when a person is unable to go through the turmoil in life and is pulled in different directions by worldly lures and is placed in a bewildering situation unable to extricate himself from reaching his goal, there appears a spiritual leader who, providing him with knowledge, leads him to salvation. Sri Madhwacharya, the saint-humanist, is one of our foremost messengers of god, who has left his indelible imprints for humanity.

Sri Vishwesha Thirtha Swami of Pejawar Math, Udupi, in a discourse said even as gold is ever pure but has to be cleansed in fire when it is dug out of earth as nuggets covered

with dirt, man is essentially good in nature but due to the impact of temptations and by the influence exerted by pleasures, forgets the purpose of his birth. The impurities in his mind are removed by the directives of spiritual masters who make him shine like gold.

The feature of Sri Madhwa's interpretation is that he harmonises all the Vedic passages in the light of a single principle that they glorify and adore, the abode of infinite auspicious qualities, Lord Narayana, who according to him is Supreme. Sri Narayana(or Hari or Vishnu) is the Ultimate Reality. When He is described as a person, He is not to be compared to a human being. There is no difference between the Lord and His qualities. He is full of knowledge, power and love. Man and god can never become one, he emphasises.

Explaining further in detail, Sri Vidyamanya Thirtha Swami of Palimar Math and Bandarkere Math (Udipi) said, individual souls are His creatures, depending on Him for their existence. God has laid down that each soul should work out its moral life. Salvation (Moksha) is the bestowal of His grace. The way to it is pure devotion and love which can grow with one's ethical excellence and ceremonial purity.

The God of Sri Madhwa's philosophy does not give the prizes of life to the souls in a whimsical manner. Each gets his desserts according to the consequences of his actions. Thus, God can never be accused of partiality. The physical world is the Lord's creation. He prescribes Devotion as the supreme method to attain the Lord. Sri Madhwa admits, in his theory of knowledge, three sources, perception, inference and scriptures, giving the highest place to the last.

January 20, 1995

Man's faculties must be put to right use 11.31

God's benefactions to humanity are countless. The proper functioning of the Senses among these are of immense significance. To repay the debt of gratitude to the mercy shown by Him, it is the duty of man to put them to proper use. The eyes should feast on the radiance of God in idol forms, the ears listen only to His sportive deeds while the nose should enjoy the fragrance of the garlands decorating His images. The other organs should be utilised only to adore Him.

While each of these Senses can carry out only one specified task, the tongue alone has a twin purpose, of not only praising God's qualities but also tasting food. The power of speech should be carefully utilised for uttering only gentle and kind words and not for indulging in glib talk or gossip. The food consumed should be pure and should have been first offered to God. In Bhagavad Gita, God has explained the right types of food which maintains balance of mind and those if consumed result in the tendency to do wrong deeds and kindle baser instincts lurking within.

The duties enjoyed upon man when discharged properly will enable him to think only good, speak only what is pleasant and act only in a virtuous manner. These duties are of a different nature for householders and ordinary devotees and for spiritual leaders, particularly those who have become ascetics. Both should always think of God's mercy and benevolence and meditate constantly on His bewitching forms to cross the ocean of worldly existence effortlessly. Sri Vidhyadheesha Thirtha (Junior Swami of Udupi Palimar Math) explained in a discourse, the significance of two month vow intended for Sannyasis (who normally are on the move) to stay at one place (a pilgrim centre or a holy place on the banks

of a river) and devote this period to spread God's message. Their food habits must be austere. To the extent possible, they must maintain silence, relaxing it to give discourses on scriptural works. Their camp at one centre will ensure that plants and insects which appear copiously during this season when there will be heavy rain are not disturbed or trampled upon.

Tirumala is considered so sacred that saints of olden days thought that to walk on the Hills is itself an act of sacrilege. They had only crawled to reach the shrine. Purandaradasa, Vadiraja, Kanakadasa and other saints have sung on Lord Srinivasa. Religious works left for posterity by these torch-bears indicate that human beings can compensate to a limited extent, the benefits lavished by God on them, by paying visits to such holy places and following the directives given by Him through His representatives.

July 19, 1995

Devotional mysticism integral to religion 11.32

Devotional mysticism is an important part of religion without which God will only be a philosophic concept for intellectual discussion. God is love and the devotee wants to feel the love of God. God is beautiful and so, the latter yearns to adore Him. God is merciful and appears to the devotee as saints and prophets to demonstrate His compassion. It is by the prayers of a whole society that a saint is deputed to lead mankind to liberation. The conversations, discourses, the songs and literature which he leaves for posterity become invaluable treasures.

To explain how the Almighty responds to the impassioned pleas of His devotees, the opening verse of an outstanding hymn says that the Lord is always a step ahead of them. If the devotee prays from a reclining position. God sits and listens. If he appeals sitting, God stands. If the former stands, the Lord walks around him and acknowledges his requests. If the devotee walks and prays, God displays His love by His ecstatic way of dancing and jumping. A subtler interpretation of the same hymn is that God grants His Bliss even in a devotee's sleep by embracing the soul itself. The hymn appears in "Harikathamruthasara" spelling out the essence of the philosophy of Madhwacharya. It is considered as a mini-encyclopedia of devotion.

The Karnataka "Haridaasas" were Divine bards who spread God's glory through music. Their compositions are available as Devaranama (Divine attributes). The term Daasa means a servant of God. Purandaradasa was foremost among such minstrels. Another illustrious devotee who adopted this path was Vijayadasa.

The illustrious spiritual leader who composed 'Harikathamruthasara'. Jagannathadasa (1728-1809) was a distinguished scholar in Sanskrit, Srinivasappa, as he was known before being conferred with this name was proud of his proficiency in Sanskrit and so used to be indifferent to the Dasas. But to insult such saints was considered as an affront to God Himself. Srinivasappa developed acute stomach ache which he was unable to cure with medicines. He was directed (in dreams) to seek the blessings of Vijayadasa who in turn sent him to his disciple and another, Gopaladasa, who invoking the mercy of God through a soul-stirring song cured his ailment. said Sri V. Seshagiri Rao in a discourse. The relief came when Srinivasappa took a dip in the river in Pandarpur and emerged totally free from the ache. He became "Jagannathadasa". Combining his erudition

with the blessings showered on him by his mentors, he rendered the great poem "Harikathamruthasara" in 32 Sandhis.

October 13, 1995

The Lord responds to sincere devotion 11.33

Whenever men forget the ultimate purpose of life, messengers of God appear and with their devotion, re-direct the course of humanity. These Divine personalities have hailed from different strata of society to show the open door to heaven to one and all. They are essentially sent by the Almighty to flood the world with devotion, dispassion and compassion. They are hence the source of Divine life and it is they who sustain the Law of Righteousness. Usually, they are caused to be born in ordinary families and hence they lead a very simple life.

Devotional mysticism has revealed how an ardent devotee wants to feel the love of God. Through His acts the Lord has shown that He bows to devotion. He comes when devotees discharge their ordained duties with a dedicated spirit and responds to their sincere entreaties.

Through His manifestation, God has also shown how to reach Him in this age. The scriptures describe four types of mirrors through which men can approach Him. The first is the universe itself functioning as a mirror; the second is that of discrimination; the third, saints and lastly, the idols. The last one also includes devotional prayers and chanting, and is the most efficacious path to God in this age. Thousands

of devotees have experienced the presence of God within their hearts and attained the spiritual kingdom by reciting the name of "Panduranga", one of the glorious forms of God enshrined in the temple at Pandaripur, a pilgrimage centre.

Lord Krishna as Panduranga visited the house of one of His devotees who, engaged in the service of his parents, asked the former to wait till he completed his routine. The Lord stood outside and in this posture, He is still seen in that holy centre, explained Swami Kesavadas in his discourse. The spiritual discipline through which the idol is propitiated by His devotees is known as "Ekadasi", a vow of fasting. It is a holy day of prayer and communion with God. Observance of this vow makes the Senses remain in tune with the Divine. Fasting helps a person to concentrate and secure peace of mind. Apart from religious benefits, man's health will improve.

A devotional system, the Varkari cult has spread in the name of Panduranga. Varkaris are devotees of this deity who congregate at Pandaripur at least twice a year on "Ekadasi" days, chanting the Lord's name and spreading God's message through singing and story-telling claiming themselves as His tools. The stories of several mystics who have realised Panduranga have been chronicled by the biographers Mahipathi and Nabhaji. The soul stirring Divine hymns of the galaxy of such saints transport the listeners to transcendental consciousness.

June 14, 1996

God's grace helps resist temptations 11.34

The ephemeral nature of man's brief stay in the world has been described through many examples in scriptural texts. One among them refers to the pitiable plight of a frog in

forest. One day, caught in the hot sun, it was desperately in need of a shady place. It found one after intense search and started relaxing thereunder, not realising that the place so chosen was a dangerous one and with a possibility of its life ending at any second. It was resting unknowingly under the raised hood of a serpent.

In an identical manner, men who are caught in the cycle of re-births, do not understand that they will have to go repeatedly through life's turmoil and bewildering problems. People have been chasing material pleasures mistaking them for permanent happiness. Men are losing faith in moral values and in religious beliefs. Life indeed is a warfare from the dawn of intelligence till the last sight of death. Like the frog in the above tale, men also tend to take life easy, without doing the prescribed exercises for securing liberation.

A person may try to justify the joy he derives in enjoying worldly pleasures. But sages and saints have pointed out how these activities will breed desires and ultimately ruin the person. People's life-spans are as brief as the presence of light in a lamp: When the oil gets exhausted, the brightness all-round will vanish. Men can resist earthly temptations by securing the grace of God, who will help them if they show sincere devotion and cling to His feet, to secure inner Bliss. The triumvirate of the Madhwa school of religious thought - Sri Madhwacharya, the commentator of his holy texts, Sri JayaThirtha and the dialectician Sri Vyasa Thirtha have left messages of hope for mankind. They have clearly dwelt on the eternal relationship of man's dependence on the Supreme Lord, the continual and continuing cause of all their activities and movements.

Sri Vishwesha Thirtha Swami of Udupi Pejawar Math in a discourse, elaborating on the nature of "Bliss" latent in an individual, narrated the story of a wealthy man who

had left a good deal of money and property, kept hidden beneath the ground. Not aware of the extent of the riches so accumulated and saved by him, his family members led a life of penury. Likewise people of the present day do not know of the extent of spiritual treasure made available to them by saints. Following their instructions, they can experience permanent joy which is latent in them. They unfortunately lead, while in this world of attraction, a life of spiritual poverty. The soul, which is capable of providing men with eternal pleasures, has to get rid of the consequences of past deeds before becoming eligible for liberation.

July 26, 1996

Devotion, supreme way to liberation 11.35

Among the countless saints who pioneered and sustained the Bhakti movement, the poet-saints of Maharashtra occupy an important position. The Bhaktavijaya of Mahipati gives an account of the lives of these saints who all lived in and around Pandharpur, the centre of Vittala faith. It is now generally acknowledged that the Bhakti movement in medieval India played an integrating factor in bringing together Hindus and Muslims as brothers on the same spiritual platform.

Though they all hailed from different backgrounds they were all one in their mystical or intuitive realisation of God. All the saints who followed the Vittala faith glorified the name of God as the supreme means of attaining liberation. A perusal of their lives show that they did not renounce worldly activities and were able to lead a God-centred life within the family. But this did not deter them in their single-minded devotion to God.

The founder of this tradition was Pundarika who had the great fortune of having been visited by God due to his service to his parents. While engaged in serving his parents he is credited with having thrown a brick to God to stand upon till he finished his duty. And the Lord stood waiting for his devotee, with both hands, on His waist. The image of Vittala in Pandharpur is in this pose and the name of the deity is derived from the word "Vita" meaning brick, the other popular name being Panduranga.

In his discourse Sri Krishna Premi Swami said, though the saints of the Vittala tradition belonged to various castes and communities, they were all one in teaching a simple way to God - faith and devotion to Him, repetition of His name in Namasamkirtana and pilgrimage to Pandharpur. The Bhakti literature in the form of Abhangs left behind by these saints are marked for their simplicity and piety.

Namadev and Thukaram, who is believed to be the re-incarnation of Namdev, are respected by the Varkaris, the followers of Vittala, because together, they are supposed to have sung a 100 crore Abhangs. They lived, breathed and sung the glory of God throughout their lives since they were born to sing His glory.

Historically, Thukaram lived during the time of Shivaji whose Guru was Samartha Ramadas. The king revered Thukaram and on seeing his pitiable condition which was due to neglecting his business in his preoccupation with worship of God, sent him a plate of gold coins to help him. The saint trembled at the sight of gold and when the king pleaded with him to accept it atleast to entertain the devotees who flocked to him, Thukaram refused saying that the Lord would provide whatever was necessary. Such was his faith in Providence.

February 1, 1997

Elucidation of Vedas: Puranas' value to common man 12.1

The Puranas served the purpose of magnifying the subtle truths enshrined in the Vedas and thus making them intelligible to the common man; it was therefore wrong to under-estimate their value, said Sri Kripanandavariar.

In his lecture on Kanda Puranam, Sri Variar said, but for Vyasacharya and his immortal works, Hindu Dharma would have died long ago. There were some forces current in the country that seemed to extinguish the Hindu religion. But, like the Sun, the Hindu religion can never be put out and such atheistic tendencies were only like passing clouds. Skandam, the biggest among the 18 Puranas, occupied the pride of place among the ten devoted to Saiva Siddhanta. It was because Lord Subrahmanya (known as Gnana Panditha) Himself is believed to have corrected the work, when its author, Sri Kachiyappa Sivachariar, left the written stanzas in His shrine every night. Well-versed in Sanskrit and Tamil, Sri Kachiyappa lived in Kancheepuram and was an archaka by profession. He undertook to sing Skandam in Tamil, as ordained by Lord Subrahmanya, and wrote six kandas.

As was customary among Tamil poets, Sri Kachiappa also sang the praise of the river that made the land of his writing fertile, namely the Palar. The author compares the falling of rain from the dark clouds on the Nandi Hills (the place of origin of the Palar) to the spitting of water on the Sivalinga (Sri Kalathiappar) by the dark complexioned archer, Thinnan (an ardent Siva Bhaktha who came to be known as Kannappa Nayanar). Answering critics who asked if it was proper to offer tasted food to the Lord and do abisheka with water carried in one's mouth, as

Thinnanar did, Sri Variar said the Lord would willingly accept anything offered to Him with true bhakti (devotion).

July 18, 1964

Greatness of Kandar Anubhoothi 12.2

A heart that "melts" in devotion while chanting God's names and singing His glory is an essential pre-condition for God-realisation. Saint Arunagirinathar's Kandar Anubhoothi, surcharged with spiritual fervour and packed with sacred truth, is capable of moving even a heart as hard as stone and lead it on to the feet of Lord Muruga -- the bestower of boons in Kali Yuga, said Sri Kripananda Variar in lecture.

A garland of verses exuding the fragrance of Gnana, Kandar Anubhoothi has been woven with the thread of devotion, its flowers being signified by the 51 letters of Matruka Mantra. While countless are those who have won the grace of Lord Muruga, only three had the privilege of receiving instruction from Him - Lord Siva. Agastya and Arunagirinathar - representing the best among the Devas, Rishis and human beings respectively. The saint-poet begins with an invocation to Lord Vinayaka the remover of hurdles.

The happiness one seeks through wealth, wife, children and similar earthly objects is no happiness at all. True Ananda (bliss) can come only by detaching oneself from them. In the physical sense, one may be in the midst of them, but his mind should be far removed from them, concentrating on God. Visualising Lord Muruga, with His dancing peacock, knowledge-radiating spear and lovely rooster, Arunagirinathar prays that his sole occupation should be singing His praise.

The saint admonishes his mind for leading him astray and spells out the way to redemption. He asks his mind to meditate incessantly on the feet of Lord Muruga and rid itself of all its evils by His grace. The soul itself will be freed from the misery of rebirth. The trait of "giving" should not bear the tinge of Ahankara (ego). While giving charity, one should feel that by parting with an object in favour of another he was offering to God what really belonged to Him.

March 2, 1968

Philanthropy in sublime form 12.3

Philanthropy may take any form. It need not be confined to extending financial assistance or giving alms. Even sharing knowledge by a scholar may be included in this category. Broadly, it means an act that helps another to achieve progress in life. That plants growing in unknown places may require human assistance has been proved by a rare gesture of a king.

While on his rounds on his chariot, the ruler saw a creeper on the side of the road, eager to get some prop. He grounded the vehicle near the tender plant and made it get the required support. The chariot was left there for the creeper to spread itself. He was called Paari Vallal (the outstanding donor).

But an obscure scholar who had nothing to give to anyone by way of money or otherwise, was shown a greater honour by being termed "Vallalar" for his mighty act -- of enabling all people to enjoy the vision of God through the recitation of his hymns. That was Ramalinga Swamigal who lived in

Madras for sometime and wrote a classic invoking his personal God to grant His mercy to entire mankind.

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse mentioned about a strange episode connected with the Saint. For days together, he was virtually crying to have the vision of god. When he lay in a swoon, God woke him up and he was thrilled. But minutes later, he started weeping again. Asked for the reason, Ramalinga Swami's reply was that the joy he had experienced was not available for the entire humanity. "Others also should share this ecstasy." He was hence known as "Vallalar" because while many rendered assistance to others in different ways, he was able to guide everyone to take to spiritual pursuits and adore God through hymns, seek Divine mercy and witness God's effulgence within or outside. He was attracted to Lord Subramania enshrined at Kandaswami temple. His work "Thiru Arutpa" is a treatise on character, devotion and discipline. "Keep me away from those hypocrites who may harbour a malicious plan inside their hearts but talk sweetly to everyone and act quite contrary to what they had intended or spoke."

The main thrust of his message was kindness even to animals which cannot express their poignant feelings and on Vegetarianism.

August 3, 1969

Constant tussle between intellect and emotions 12.4

Even men of virtue, who are worthy of public esteem and veneration, are sometimes known to have a vice, or at least a weakness. And, the human tendency is to magnify a blemish found in such a person and speak disparagingly of him rather than praise him for his good traits, which are

overwhelmingly larger. Why should he have any streak of vice at all? In man, a constant tussle is on between the intellect and emotions -- the latter trying to drag him into the abyss of sensory pleasures and reduce him to the level of a beast, and the former attempting to bale him out of the baser instincts and elevate him to a Divine state. A vast majority of the people become slaves to sense organs, unable to resist their pulls, and remain at the rock-bottom throughout their lives. A few, however, succeed to a large extent in overpowering the debasing impulses. For them a small push is enough to catapult them to the pinnacle of spiritual wisdom, as illustrated by the life of Thiruneelakantar, one of he top-ranking Saivite saints.

An ardent devotee of Lord Nataraja, Thiruneelakantar was so called because of his habit of uttering that hallowed name of Sri Siva even while he was engaged in daily chores. A potter by occupation, he did his bit of service to the Lord's votaries (Adiyars) by giving them mud-bowls free. In spite of his pious disposition, he had a weakness for women - this, despite the fact that his wife was charming and was of impeccable character. But he turned over a new leaf when his wife bade him, in the name of Lord Thiruneelakantar, not to touch her. The utterance of this Divine name, which he had held as pure and sacred and a source of sustenance, has an electrifying effect on him and at that very moment, made him resolve not to touch any woman, including his wife. He stuck to this vow till his last breath, a virtually superhuman task.

Sri Keeran in his discourse said God's names constituted the most efficacious means of extricating oneself from the morass of worldly pleasures. Uttered with implicit faith and devotion, they would bring about a spiritual transformation and enlightenment.

February 25, 1977

How Justice prevailed in ancient India 12.5

Administrators in ancient India took extraordinary care to render justice to their citizens. Their endeavour was to see that real culprits did not escape the clutches of law and that even by mistake, no innocent person was made to suffer. The benefit of doubt was always given to the accused. No hasty conclusion was arrived at on the basis of suspicion or hearsay or on mere circumstantial evidence. In later years, reliance was placed on the version given by eye-witnesses, on documentary evidence or on customary right. There was no room for likes or dislikes or sentiments while awarding sentence. On certain occasions where the rulers felt helpless to arrive at a decision on account of the intricate legal points involved or when they thought that their view might be prejudical, resort to divine guidance was made by offering special (individual) prayers before their personal deity to provide them the necessary intellectual ability to pronounce the correct judgment. People had absolute confidence in the ruler's decisions because they believed him to be God's representative.

Sri Keeran in his Thiruvilayadal Puranam discourse referred to such a predicament faced by a king when a poor man brought before him a strange case that his wife, who was resting underneath a huge banyan tree, was fatally pierced by an arrow. He suspected a hunter who happened to be nearby little realising that the arrow had been dangling on the top of the tree for years and it fell down following a gale. The hunter swore in the name of God about his innocence even when tortured, to extract a confession. Ultimately, the king appealed to his deity and was given the clue to the riddle, indirectly.

March 18, 1977

Saints' role in guiding humanity 12.6

Out of his abundant mercy. God deputes His chosen representatives to the world to guide humanity and dispel darkness and ignorance in the world. Each of these apostles had a purpose. By their words and deeds, they established righteousness and showed how every individual should remain virtuous. All these noble souls are examples of Divine life. Each had chalked out a specific path for God-realisation and demonstrated practically the value of devotion. They kept the torch of Hinduism burning continuously. The summum bonum of their teachings was one could move with the Almighty by his devotion. They have taught us to be simple and humble and strip the feeling of "I" and "Mine" (ego). The lives of 63 Nayanmars, headed by the four leaders, Appar, Sundarar, Manickavachagar and Gnanasambandar. (Presented in Peria Puranam) being a practical religion, exert a tremendous influence on aspirants who are keen to feel the presence of the Almighty Some of them took delight in offering floral worship, some in cleaning the temple precincts, some burning incense, others ensuring the continuous lighting of the oil lamps in shrines, while a few adored the deities through their devotion - saturated hymns.

Sri N. R. Murugavel, in his discourse, explained the content of their psalms. The saints have referred to the method of wiping out our sins by entrusting ourselves to God and obeying what He has ordained. It is our duty to tender our apology for having wasted our time. One of the apostles proved the validity of chanting God's names. Another would not take action even against a known enemy as he had applied sacred ash on his forehead, though only to carry out a clandestine act. Formation of wrinkles and hair turning grey serve to remind humanity of the time lost in pursuing vain pleasures.

September 2, 1977

Adherence to spiritual injunctions essential 12.7

God has taken upon Himself two responsibilities - to provide ample opportunities for every creation of His (from a worm upwards) to rise to the highest level in the process of evolution. The second task is to see that those, who have become evolved souls and are in a stage of snapping the bondage, do not slide down the ladder of life. Should they err, by a quirk of fate. He will arrange for their rebirth in a noble family and set them as guides for others.

Thus, there is no use blaming God when one suffers. If a person does not worship God or refuses to carry out the spiritual obligations, he has to go through the consequences even as a boy who not having prepared properly for the Examinations cannot accuse the examiner for his failure. A crop that has been properly irrigated, weeded and manured is bound to yield a bumper harvest. God never fails His devotees.

There are occasions when God deputes a chosen few for the purpose of spreading His message and helping humanity get rid of ties. One such spiritual messenger was Sundaramurthi Nayanar, who committed a mistake in the abode of Lord Siva and was hence sent to the earth with the noble task of singing devotional hymns. He was born as the only child of a wealthy man. Impressed by the effulgence of the child the local chieftain adopted him and trained him in all fields. Being pious in nature, the parents did not hesitate to give the child to the chieftain. They took it as a Divine command.

In his discourse Sri S. R. Themozhiar explained the four-fold prescription of Saivism for realising the almighty. Chariya (service) included strict observance of spiritual injunctions

which were enunciated by sages and saints. The tradition laid down by them should be honoured. The other duties were Kriya representing worship, Yoga (meditation) and Jnana (spiritual knowledge). No reward could be expected if a person failed to adhere to the mandates.

June 2, 1980

Extraordinary trait of God's messengers 12.8

An outstanding trait of the messengers of God, deputed to reform people, who by mistake get entangled in worldly affairs, is their grim determination to uphold the ideals which they choose to set before themselves. They will not mind any amount of sacrifice to achieve their objectives. But the privation suffered by one of the 63 Nayanmars has no parallel, for to please a devotee of God, he went to the extent of slicing his young son into pieces cooking the flesh and offering it on a platter as a dish. Can such a monstrous act take place and should God be so cruel-hearted, a doubt may be raised. It was a test -- though severe, to prove the faith of a Saint (Siruthondar). When one sees the self-immolation of some even in the present decade to vindicate their honour, what happened centuries ago when people had total belief in the supremacy of God could never be questioned.

Pattinathar, a rich trader who sacrificed his entire wealth in a second and turned Godly, going about explaining the short-lived nature of the worldly pleasures, has praised Siruthondar for his supreme faith. It may be possible for laymen as they grow old to give up the desire to possess an article which they cherish most but not totally discard

all pleasures in a trice. Siruthondar had vowed that he would have his daily lunch only after honouring a saint. On a day, when there was no guest, God in disguise visited him, agreeing to partake food if the flesh of his only son was cooked and served. Siruthondar carried out the act when God, revealing His identity restored the boy to life making him walk in, as if nothing had happened.

Sri Keeran in his discourse said while butter is not visible in plain milk, its presence can be traced in pure curd though converted from the former. Ordinary mortals may not easily perceive God in the evolved souls but Saints can easily identify who are the true representatives of the Almighty. Saints will never compromise on principles.

June 13, 1980

The strength of devotion 12.9

Changes are bound to occur in man's life. Never is a person allowed to remain stagnant. Prosperity and adversity will alternate and one who was enjoying a great reputation may have to remain unnoticed, whereas a commoner may be suddenly pushed into prominence.

Devotion provides a person the strength to treat them alike. That without Divine guidance, man can never function is revealed in the character of Arjuna. A mighty warrior who could once challenge even Lord Siva, he was helpless at a later stage when Lord Krishna had left this world, and could not defend himself from ordinary soldiers.

Narrating the life of one of the greatest Saivite saints. Arunagirinathar, Sri Kripanandavariar briefly referred to the manner in which the saint spent his early days in chasing pleasures and how Lord Subramania taught him a special

mantra, commanding him to visit various temples and sing His praise.

A totally transformed person, Arunagirinathar poured out his agony and exuberance through his immortal hymns called "Thiruppugazh" (about 16,000 in number). Some of these psalms extol the traits of the Lord of Mylapore as it was here that centuries ago. Thirugnanasambandar, another apostle, revived a child Poompavai who was smitten by a snake.

In a brilliant song, Arunagirinathar has explained the chief trait of a devout person - always yearning to see the joy in the face of devotees by removing their hunger and by deriving pleasure in witnessing the decorated idols of the deities he worships. Even the very participation in a consecration ceremony is a privilege for an individual. By taking part in the rites, he could obtain blessings of the Almighty in abundance.

God showers His benevolence on a trader who, by his honest dealings makes genuine savings and builds a sizeable 'bank balance' over a decade and also on a poor person by providing him for instance with a treasure-trove when he digs a well.

June 28, 1980

Soul-force needs to be awakened 12.10

Man is the architect of his own life. The ebb and flow of human fortunes are sometimes attributed to past deeds (Karma). In some extraordinary cases destiny is overcome by those who gain control over the disintegrating forces within their Self and outside and are set on the path of realising the Divine.

The seeds of soul-force lie dormant in the heart of everyone. It should be awakened and developed to execute the purposes of this world and of the worlds beyond. The physical body is the temple of God. The heart is the sacred sanctum. The lips which utter the holy "Mantra" (Panchaksharam) form the entrance tower. The sense organs are the lamps lit in the shrine. In the ultimate resort, God, whom we worship, is the "Atma" within. Though it is true that God dwells in every creature, yet the human body is a shrine of a distinct kind.

By careful reasoning and patient research, it is possible to know the Supreme Being, neither equalled nor excelled by anyone else, said Sri Pandrimalai Swamigal in a message. But the truth lies concealed from our view. The barriers should be destroyed by the dagger of the Panchakshara Mantra. To be effective, this Mantra should be learnt by an earnest seeker by the process of initiation by a spiritual mentor.

Saint Thirumoolar says: "There is a tasty fruit; it is a good one and its name is Namasivaya; when chewed it is soft but when eaten, it is sweetness itself. A devotee should trust the words of holy men and pious souls, who have realised God. Contemplative wisdom of the Guru and practical Sadhana are essential for the success of a devotee".

April 27, 1982

The compassion of God-loving people 12.11

Even a confirmed, hardened, habitual criminal can be reformed by preventive methods if not by punitive measures. This can be achieved by reminding such a person of his death. No man can remain unnerved when he is told of his impending

end and he will think twice before committing a crime. His entire attitude will change and giving up his turbulent ways, he will behave courteously avoid confrontation, try to get a good name and will be counting the days for his exit.

In his work, Thirumandiram, giving the essence of Saivism, Thirumoolar specifies the steps for the happy husband-spouse relationship, and explains how to get over problems facing man and how to achieve perfection.

An unscrupulous man who was striking terror among the people was called by one who was deeply respected in society and was informed that he had only a few days left to live. The evil-doer gave up his threats, admitted his guilt and was anxiously awaiting the scheduled hour. When the call from the 'God of Death'' did not come, he learnt that it was a ruse, but maintained his total transformation, as, all the time he was thinking only of his death. He was told that the same amount of concentration towards a better cause would have fetched him Bliss.

Thirumandiram, forming part of the ''Thirumurai'' -- hymns compiled from the works of Nayanmars and other Saivite apostles, refers to the manner by which a pious and God-loving person could be distinguished from one who fails to use his thinking faculty. The former would be deeply concerned about the sorrow experienced by the humanity at large, would shed tears as if he was personally affected and try to wipe the tears of those who were suffering, Sri M.N. Sankaranarayanan said in a discourse. Himself endowed with supernatural powers. Thirumoolar unable to bear the cry of a herd of cows at the loss of their master, ''transmigrated'' into his body and brought joy to the animals.

May 9, 1983

Saivism's stress on being merciful 12.12

Among the various philosophies of India and the world, Saivism and Saiva Siddhanta occupy a prominent place. Saivism was not founded by any individual and has no date of origin. Saiva Siddhanta is considered one of the perfect and clear systems of human thought. It is not dogmatic and its teachings are based solely upon sound rationalism, giving preference to "inference" (Anumanam). The first three 'Sutras' of Sivagnana Botham are proved by this process. Nothing in it is taken for granted nor anything asserted arrogantly. It presents its view-points in a logical manner, according due place to epistemology. Saint Arulnandi Sivacharya has summarised the methodology in 14 verses.

The truths propounded by Saiva Siddhanta are confirmed by modern scientific research. The system was formulated not by ordinary mortals or intellectual giants, prone to blemishes and foibles but by saints. It respects the views of other religionists and embraces their thoughts wherever necessary with a feeling of fellowship. The exponents taught people that God is love and insisted on their being kind and merciful towards all creations. The proclamation of Saint Sundarar and Sekkizhar's comment thereon irrefutably uphold the universality of the Saiva religion. It does not advocate self-mortification. There are no rigid rules, no cruel injunctions and no coercive restrictions. It is not obscurantist and inimical to any desirable, useful and worthy reform needed from time to time. The temples of Lord Siva, with their massive structures high sanctity and splended sculpture, inspire piety.

In a discourse, Sri N. R. Murugavel said the symbolism of the various images and sculptures in Saiva temples are a mine of philosophic wisdom and spiritualism. The Thevaram hymns of the Saivite apostles are peerless. The human destiny, the cycle of births and deaths and the methods to get liberation

are elaborately dealt with in the Saiva Siddhanta scriptures. The essence of the doctrines has been distilled from such immortal works like Thirumandiram, Thirumurai, Tholkappiam and Thirukkural.

March 6, 1984

Love for God should start at young age 12.13

Man should have an ideal in his journey through life; otherwise, his existence will be purposeless. As a youth, he is bound to be interested in the pursuit of a career; when he gets married, he will be burdened with family chores and when old, his faculties will fail and he my not be able to use his thinking capacity. Hence, it is necessary to take steps, from an early age, to realise God. For this, our forebears have laid down the royal route of devotion and service.

Those who want to reach the realm of the Almighty should study scriptures, acquire knowledge and practise discipline. The message contained in the Vedas and the Upanishads, the injunctions in the Agamas and the religious doctrines in other Divine utterances, have all been spelt out in the outstanding work-the Thiruvachagam by Manickavachagar, Prime Minister-turned-apostle, who helped arrest the tide of atheism centuries ago. Along with three other chief patron-saints of Saivism, Manickavachagar re-established the glory of Hinduism.

In a discourse Sri M.N. Sankaranarayanan referred to the manner in which God made all the saints go through ordeals and emerge triumphant. There could be no better

example to prove this than the lives of Siruthondar and Kannappar. Also all the saints sought the help of other god-men in their endeavour to uphold righteousness, revealing thereby the necessity for everyone to go through the instructions of preceptors. Manickavachagar was entrusted with funds to purchase horses for the royal stable but due to Divine intervention, he diverted the same for devotional purposes. He was put to a severe test but God enabled him to get out of it, unscathed. The Thiruvachagam is the eighth among the 12 Thirumurai (sacred literature) spreading Saiva Siddhanta. There are innumerable revelations in this "blessed" work.

Lord Siva Himself copied the hymns of.the saint and deposited the manuscripts in the Chidambaram temple. The priests who were astounded by this Divine act, were asked to seek the guidance of the saint himself, who was in deep meditation in a place on the outskirts of the town for expounding the philosophy. The recitation of the Divine poetry will lead us to the Kingdom of God.

June 24, 1985

Divine plan to lift man from rut 12.14

The main ingredient of devotion is resolute faith that will never fail. No one should feel dejected when he is subjected to trials because they form part of the Divine plan to elevate a man from the rut. It is God's desire that His devotees should become so conditioned as to take both pleasure and pain as Divine dispensation. The more the test, the greater should be the determination to hold on to His feet, fully confident that good alone will emerge.

Unfortunately human tendency is to "curse" God when man faces difficulties. When he gets a carbuncle, he rushes to a doctor who removes it by surgery. Not only the patient

bears the pain but he rewards the doctor. Likewise, he should face the innumerable hardships which he may be put to, without blaming anyone. They are intended to remove the ego and attachment in man and lead him on to the road to heaven.

Why then some people are spared from such ordeals, while some others are immersed in misery forever. God knows what is good for His devotees and in this realm, man has no authority to question His "sport".

Devotees have approached God through different methods like intense worship, service to humanity, cleansing of temples and preaching His gospel. How they were attracted to God and their contribution in the form of hymns have been classified as "Thirumurai". Of the 12 groups, the last one mentions how these devotees derived the benefits from God by demonstrating their unshakeable faith. In this work, Peria Puranam, by the former Chola Chief Minister, Sekkizhar, the biographies of 63 Saivite apostles have been strung as a garland.

In a discourse Sri Keeran narrated the sacrifice of "Siru Thondar" who took a vow that he would not take his daily lunch without sharing it with a God's servant. In such a task, his wife extended full co-operation. Lord Siva, in the guise of a mendicant, visited him, demanding that he should be served with a dish made of human flesh, that too of a child of five without any physical handicap. Another harsh condition was that the boy should be sliced by the parents. Since their only son fitted into these rigorous standards, the couple did not mind offering such a dish. Pleased with their perseverance, the Lord revealed Himself and restored the child to them.

January 2, 1987

Compassion is the noblest of virtues 12.15

"A situation may arise when a son may discard his mother or the latter may forsake her children; when a scholar may not be in a position to use the gift of his accumulated wisdom; the soul within may give up the body encasing it or the eyes may fail to wink or its lids refuse to bat, but I shall not refrain from remembering and praising the glory of god." Perhaps bearing in mind the general tendency of people not acknowledging the bounteous boons conferred on them by God, a saint who had absolute faith in Divine dispensation and compassion, sang the above lines in one of his 31 soul stirring songs in praise of Lord Subramania in Madras.

His monumental work "Thiru Arutpa" (Poem of Divine Grace) is a literary masterpiece, contributed in six parts, five dealing with visible deities and the sixth, adoring the impersonal God. While he has extolled all the four principal Saivite Nayanmars, he recommended the mastering of "Thiruvachagam" to all. He was so attached to its contents that he did not fail to read it even on the day of his marriage. This illustrious personality was Ramalinga Swamigal, popularly known as "Vallalar", who shed his mortal coil on June 1874 at the age of 51.

Sri N. Giridhari Prasad in a discourse said, Saint Ramalinga's philosophy known as "Suddha Sanmarga" asks a pious man to always display his eagerness to see the forms of God.

Saint Ramalinga Swamigal preached the Gospel of Divine compassion and sympathy towards animals. He founded three institutions -- one to make a man lead a better life(Sanmarga Sangam); to feed the poor and to see that they maintained their health (Dharma Salai). the former was intended to mould man's character and the latter, to take care of his

physical needs. The third was the "Jnana Sabai" (House of Grace) wherein prayers were offered without distinction of caste or colour.

October 6, 1987

Humility, chief trait of God's apostles 12.16

The most outstanding tradition in Hinduism is to be considerate even to the worst offender and heartless enemy. The great adage that if someone slapped you on one cheek, you should show him the other has been excelled in that the Hindu saints and sages went a step further to express regret for the man who gave the slap since in the process, he would have suffered pain in the hand. A deputy of God even tried to soothen the hand that beat him by smearing sandal paste on it. Concern for others welfare is of prime importance for such holy men. Their existence among the sea of humanity cannot be easily identified because they will never seek fame and their habits will be simple. They will have no desire while humility will be their chief trait. But their words will carry weight. Their actions may baffle others, but they will have God's approval.

One among the Saivite apostles, Nandanar, displayed his grief when his employer tried to beat him for what he considered a lapse in his work, as the hand that beats would ache. Compassion to every one was in their veins. This was because of their devotion to God, resulting in their witnessing the presence of the Almighty in every one of His creations. Lord Rama (God in human form) excused the grievous crime of a crow and again, He permitted Ravana, who stood deprived of arms to come back fully equipped. Devotion and detachment will remove the stains of all sins.

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse said Nandanar's life clearly highlights that caste is of no consideration at all, in receiving Divine grace. Nandanar hailed from the most backward class, resided in a cottage amid detestable conditions and was eking out his living by tanning skins which were used for making temple instruments. But he turned out to be the greatest devotee of Lord Nataraja of Chidambaram and took a vow to worship Him at any cost. God made the priests realise his greatness and asked them to welcome him.

June 20, 1988

Tools to get through world's problems 12.17

God's kindness has no limit. Just to give an example, mention can be made about His free "gift" of 32 different types of "tools" to help mankind to steer through world's problems. They are intended to be used for beneficial purposes. They include the earth from where crops are raised for the very sustenance of humanity, fire for cleansing, air to breathe and water to quench thirst and for other vital needs, the five Sense Organs, other faculties which make a person carry out his obligations, some enabling him to resort to spiritual duties and others to acquire knowledge. Each has a specific task to perform but the tongue has twin jobs - to taste food and to make utterances. An extraordinary and delicate function is assigned to the tongue in that it should use measured words, not injure others' sentiments and praise the glory of God. The remarkable manner in which a saint utilised this fine tool to spread the gospel of God earned him the title of "King of Speech." He was Thirunavukkarasar (also known as Appar), one of the four "Fathers of Faith" who popularised Saiva Siddhanta (Saivism).

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse referred to the tests which God often gives to His deputies while appearing on the stage of the world, to make others realise that they are not punitive in nature but enable men to purify themselves and hold on to His feet with greater force. He was brought up by his sister who was a symbol of Indian womanhood in that though her marriage was betrothed but was not consummated, as the bridegroom died in a battle,she chose to remain single. Appar who opted to serve the ruler wedded to Jainism had bouts of severe colic pain and all efforts to get rid of the illness having turned futile,at his sister's suggestion, worshipped Lord Siva and smeared sacred ash when he obtained relief. His "defection" enraged the ruler, who along with others made him undergo tortures like being thrown into a burning kiln, consuming poison, trampled by an elephant and being pushed into the sea, tied to a stone but he was least affected, as he was ever meditating upon the vision of Lord Siva. In his tour of pilgrim centres, he met Thirugnanasambandar, another leader of Saivism Appar had also gained the respect of a great devotee, Appoodi Adigal and the Saint restored life to his son when he was bitten by a snake. The outpourings of this minstrel along with those of other Divine messengers are called Thevaram.

March 28, 1989

Men of wisdom should always be obeyed 12.18

There are certain prohibited acts, which if carried out in defiance of injunctions, will deserve total condemnation and for which there is absolutely no atonement. A minister

in a cabinet is never expected to perform duties which will land his kingdom in trouble or which will weaken its sovereignty. Men should obey the counsel tendered by patrons of wisdom and experience,who ought to be revered and honoured and not insulted. Ingratitude is listed as the third category, whereby men are asked to remain grateful for the help received in times of dire need. Lastly, those who have taken food in another's house should not work against the interests of the host and show treachery towards him.

These deeds are categorised as unpardonable. Saints have left a great treasure to posterity in the form of inexhaustible scriptural literature which when read, digested and its contents followed, will enable people to do away with rebirths. Should we not be grateful to them for such guidance. In case we forget these saints and sages, we will deserve punishment for our ungratefulness.

The "Thiruvachagam" by Saint Manickavachagar in chaste Tamil should be studied for its devotional content. Unfortunately men do not uphold the teachings therein. The cow, consuming only the waste products we offer (like hay and bran), give us in turn the rich nutritious milk. But this precious liquid when administered to a cobra, turns into poison, serving as a typical case of ingratitude.

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse cited the episode in the Mahabharata where Lord Krishna explains why He opted to stay in the humble residence of Vidhura discarding the lavish reception arranged by Duryodhana. Should He take food in Duryodhana's palace, the purpose of His peace mission would become meaningless because He should not act against the host's wishes. Lord Krishna said He always remained impartial. Though Thiruvachagam does not form part of Sekkizhar's Peria Puranam, containing the lives of all Nayanmars, yet its date related to third century. His biography was not included

in monumental work because He was considered coeval with God and not a mere servant of God. Lord Siva Himself wrote the Thiruvachagam as dictated by the Saint. It is said that Ramalinga Swamigal used to faint due to devotional empathy whenever the work was recited before him. While there are 11 Mantras governing worship in Saivism, Thiruvachagam reflects the "Siksha Mantram".

March 29, 1989

Human action is subject to God's will 12.19

The ego in man is responsible for him to feel that he can get anything done through his efforts, little realising that the activities of every individual are governed by the approval given by an Unseen force. The vanity in him also makes him claim superiority over others. If both these are shed, he will come to know the superior powers of God and will naturally seek God's guidance at every stage. Hence, no one should develop the attitude of taking pride in his success or accusing God for his failures.

Development of devotion will make him submit to the Almighty's supreme powers and this can be achieved only if he gradually gets himself detached from worldly pleasures and material comforts and adopts measures which will make him go nearer God. But devotion does not mean barter -- carrying out an act and immediately expecting a reward. God knows what a person deserves.

Advising people to eschew ego and ostentatious display of riches, Sri Jayendra Saraswathi in a discourse explained how a cashier in a bank dare not take home any currency

note from the amount he handles even if he is in deep financial crisis. He is aware that the money does not belong to him and that he should be contented with his salary. Likewise, an employee in a jewellery shop who displays the ornaments before customers will not think of taking home a bangle or a chain to give it to members of his family. He will be more worried about his permanent income than the temporary gain.

Courage of conviction and devotion to duty should be the chief guiding factors in a man's life, which will provide him self-confidence needed to face any problem and overcome them. The lives of Appar and Manickavachagar, the Saivite apostles who had to undergo innumerable hardship, show that they never allowed their morale to sag even during times of extreme adversity.

In modern days, people have come to develop a false prestige and on that score will not mind allowing even persons of doubtful integrity in their homes and welcome them not realising that they are undesirables. Wrong notions should be discarded and persons should move only with those who are sincere devotees of God and who tread the spiritual path. Children should be taught to honour such elders.

February 19, 1990

Aberration from right path will be punished 12.20

God will not absolve anyone of his sins. He will not forget His commitment to His devotees. These two factors can be found reflected in the manifestations of sages and

saints. They are deputed frequently to be amidst people in the world to bring them back to the path of devotion from which they had strayed. Their message related to the transient nature of the worldly pleasures and an advice to people not to get lured by them. Instead, they can enjoy permanent happiness in Heaven if they take necessary steps to escape from the grips of attachment and lures.

What distinguished these messengers of God from laymen was that they never failed to admit the mistakes they had committed. The worldly men, on the other hand will never own their faults but may even try to throw the blame on others. It is a grave crime to carry out a prohibited act in the presence of men wedded to virtue and Godly souls.

The Saivite philosophy which prescribes the methods to establish link with God through worship and service refers to the greatness of a permanent aide in Lord Siva's abode, who slipped from the path of righteousness (having yielded his mind for a moment towards two celestial damsels). He was made to spend a brief period in the world, as Sundaramurthi Nayanar propagating the Lord's guidelines for a peaceful life.

Sri Kripanandavariar in his discourse said, the companion of God who was thrown amidst humanity contributed outstanding material to firmly establish Saiva Siddhanta, through his work "Thiruthondathogai". Based on this, Sekkizhar elaborated the biographies of the 63 Saivite apostles in his monumental book "Peria Puranam".

Even as Bharatha (in the Ramayanam) in his joy on learning about the arrival of Sri Rama back to the capital on completion of His exile, offered worship to his own body, indicating the acme of the state of exuberance, Sekkizhar also performed a similar act as he considered the very visit to the places associated with Sundaramurthi Nayanar a privilege.

the Saint lost his vision when he failed to honour a pledge but it was restored when he tendered his apology before God. In his very brief life span, he visited numerous temples and poured out religious sentiments through numerous hymns.

July 28, 1990

Saints who displayed total dedication 12.21

One among the effective methods to win the grace of God, for a devotee, is to get himself engaged in serving Him. This service to the Divinity, which may assume different forms, should not be equated with other similar activities. This servitude is not slavery but arises out of love, unlike one person obeying another or a country submitting to the superior one. Total dedication at God's feet pleading with Him to grant permanent relief from bondage is bound to please Him.

The lives of the illustrious Saivite saints - the Nayanmars presented by the distinguished biographer Sekkizhar in his Peria Puranam reveal how they displayed their devotion and saw Lord Siva. Their outpourings, presented to posterity as Thevaram and other hymns point out how religion formed part of man's daily activities reminding him at every stage of the Divine.

After a few centuries when the influence of other religions dominated over Hinduism in the southern region, revival of the ancient traditions, which were fortunately preserved in the innumerable temples was brought about by the Nayanmars and other servants of God. Their hymns as well as those in the Divya Prabhandams, kindled people's sentiments and awakened them from their temporary slumber, making them

take to the cult of devotion.

In a lecture, Sri Gnanaprakasa Swamigal (Thondaimandalam Adheenam) said the apostles were deputed by God to establish Moral Order. Thirunavukkarasar (also known as Appar) held on to Lord Siva's feet when he was subjected to tortuous tests but emerged unscathed from all of them. He took to the path of service.

To this servant of God was a devotee, Appoodi Adigal, who had not seen Appar but was attached to him and ran charitable institutions in his name. A study of the activities of the servitors of God shows how they preached detachment towards worldly objects.

Thirunavukkarasar's faith was so firm that he offered ''Sathyagraha'' through 'Ahimsa' till a deity in a temple which was believed to have been hidden, was made to appear.

December 5, 1991

Past deeds decide re-birth 12.22

Does a man take birth out of his own volition? If not, who is responsible for his appearance? What makes such an authority to do so? If it is accepted that God is behind such an act, why then should there be differences among His creations?

For a person, having experienced severe trials desire to avoid being born, what steps are to be taken? These and allied doubts ought to be cleared if a man wants to pursue a purposeful life.

The basic fact to be understood by all is that re-birth is based on past deeds. If a person had carried out the spiritual

directives in his previous birth, thereby proving his faith in God's supremacy, his life now will be smooth and he will be given the moral courage to face problems. If he had disobeyed Divine Law and had deliberately flouted established norms, he will have to go through the punishment.

If he accepts that God controls his activities and submits to Him, the rewards will be bounteous if he denies Him, that person will be subjected to difficulties. This suggests that to ensure that at least his next birth will be Divine-oriented and one based on righteousness, he should display his total reliance on Him and do only pious acts. If he misbehaves, the re-birth may be in any other form.

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse referred to the various instances where people or other God's creations were granted exalted status for their devotion and also made to suffer for their sinful acts. Siva Mahapuranam mentions about a hunter and his wife in a dense forest, welcoming a saint who lost his way and providing him with shelter for the night in their cave which, at a time, could accommodate only two.

The hunter who spent the night outside was devoured by a beast and the women seeing this, died and the sage too perished in the flames. The couple were re-born as Nala and Damayanti, the sage as a swan that brought about their reunion.

On the Cauvery river bank, there existed a Siva Lingam which was found to be frequently covered by layers of dried leaves falling from a nearby huge tree. A spider, which wanted to prevent this spread its web (as a net) over the image, was made a famous Chola emperor.

Saint Pattinathar, mistaken as the thief who had stolen a queen's necklace was punished by his body being stationed on the sharp tip of a wooden pole. His prayers made the

pole go up in flames. He regretted the way in which fate had played its role in his case and how his suffering was due to his past. "If we uphold the Law of Righteousness, God will surely give us proper guidance".

January 30, 1992

Guide for the seeker of spiritual knowledge 12.23

God is one. Though unlimited, His grace is of two kinds-one to punish the evil-minded and the other, to protect the obedient and the virtuous. He has three (among the many) unrivalled traits-compassion, knowledge and energy and motivate sincere men to feel, aspire, act and experience, step by step. Godliness by controlling their five senses. The six limbs are intended to reach the thinking faulty which is the seventh in the order of his spiritual pursuit and ultimately realise that God is all-pervading in the eight elements-earth, water, fire, air, sky, sun, moon and the soul.

The invocatory verse of "Thirumandiram", a Saivaite classic, tells us what he proposes to expatiate in the succeeding ones in his investigative treatise. Commentators of this unique single verse say that the saint's perception of the Almighty is confined to eight numericals and the link between life, soul and the cosmos.

Thirumoolar says that an aspirant's efforts to reach the goal of perfection would make him realise that God alone is perfect, because He has the three attributes of being omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient.

Thirumandiram, a treatise by Saint Thirumoolar, one of the 18 "Enlightened souls" (siddhars), containing 3108 psalms,

deals with human nature, his mission in life, what are the problems he has to counteract during his quest to reach his goal and measures to overcome these hurdles. The sage's declarations, in barest minimum of words but packed with philosophic thoughts are intended to guide the seeker of spiritual knowledge, said Dr. V. Rathnasabapathy in a lecture.

An aspirant at some stage during his life journey, either after having undergone ordeals, sufferings, experiences (pleasant or otherwise) or by a sudden turn of events, would look back and feel, through self-introspection, that he has wasted the days. This would create an urge in him to spend his remaining years usefully and try to reach the stage of perfection. The Thirumandiram aphorisms would guide him and protect him in his spiritual pursuit.

August 17, 1993

Scriptural texts cleanse mind of impurities 12.24

"Do we have any chemical to wipe out impurities in our mind", Yes, says our holy literature. Texts packed with spiritual exercises take the role of detergents in this task. The mind can be flushed of dirt by strictly adhering to the doctrines embedded in sacred books and by upholding the guidelines laid down in religious manuals gifted by sages and seers to posterity.

The choice from them should be selective, easy to adopt, worthy, digestible and dependable. The impact of modern science and scriptural books on a person is different. Both

if properly understood and utilised, will help in man's progress.

The essence brought out from scriptures on which we plan to depend, should lead us to realise "what and where we are". An earnest enquiry towards this end by saints had resulted in spreading sublime thoughts. We should accept them with faith. One of the images of the Lord depicts (the first) three fingers of His right hand pointing upwards, and the other two (the thumb and the first finger), placed one on the other, pointing towards devotees before him. This signifies that in spiritual pursuit, the first exercise is self-realisation.

The mind is clouded by ignorance. It is like a tortoise withdrawing all its limbs within its bony shell. When warm water is sprinkled, it will slowly rear its head and spread out its limbs. Real knowledge can be acquired, like the tortoise coming out of the shell, when ignorance is removed. Acquaintance with saintly souls and reading their teachings will enable aspirants to seek truth even as the tortoise feeling the warmth of hot water comes out. Seekers of spiritual knowledge should demonstrate their sincerity by their virtuous living and look up with self-confidence. The creator is in no way responsible for a man's sufferings and hence there is no need to curse destiny, said Sri Kundrakkudi Adigalar in a lecture on Saiva Siddhanta.

In the southern region, great souls had systematised a way of life and prescribed practical methods for being adopted even by laymen. The Saiva philosophy is extremely liberal in its outlook. While spelling out the instructions for men to avoid pitfalls, saints had in mind the limitations of ordinary human beings and their day-to-day problems. A student in search of enlightenment and who goes through the immortal outpourings of the four Samayacharyas - Appar, Jnanasambandar,

Sundarar and Manickavachagar and in the later period of Meikkandar and after him numerous visionaries, will easily find an answer to the very basic question - what is religion and why its need.

November 23, 1993

The ways of reaching God 12.25

The evolving stages of a spiritual aspirant have been compared to the process of a plant developing the bud, flower, fruit and fully ripe ones. Since there can be no uniformity in the spiritual growth of man, Saivism refers to four ways by which the soul could reach the goal. To know the nature of the Self, the soul should get rid of impurities and snap the fetters which blind it. A person, on the road to progress, should render service, offer worship, practise contemplation and then obtain knowledge of the Self. The company of the devout will elevate the mind and attune it to God.

God, being ever gracious, is ready to end the sufferings of His devotees. In a sense, God too has a problem as He is troubled by the souls getting separated from Him, while He wants them to free themselves from the clutches of this worldly life, He is keen on their reaching Him.

God helps them in this task in two ways. The positive method of His intervention is to provide them with opportunities and guide them on the road to salvation. In some cases, He makes them get separated from Him, experience grief and then enable them to return to His fold. (This is a negative method). Seers and saints were liberated by both ways. The transformation of Thirunavukkarasar, one of the leaders of Saivism, was an example of the negative approach.

Sri C. Swaminathan, in a lecture, referred to the"dark" period (between 8th nd 13the centuries) when Hinduism suffered a set back under the impact of other religions which did not recognise the Vedas and rites. Great apostles, who appeared on the scene later, resuscitated th ancient glory.

Initially Thirunavukkarasar adopted the Jain faith but Siva brought him back to Hinduism by putting him to a severe test. His sister cured him of a malady, that others could not do, by applying sacred ash and directing him to worship Siva. When the irate Pallava king (a Jain) asked him why he deserted his camp, the saint sang the famous verse, "We are not subjected to anyone, nor do we fear death". Several attempts to wipe him out proved futile. His outpourings called "Thevaram" have inspired humanity. His transformation was also astounding and he demonstrated how staunch devotees should treat all troubles as joy in the service of God.

March 8, 1994

Purpose of naming children after Gods 12.26

Religious manuals not only provide us detailed instructions about the nature of duties we have to perfoŗm but also state the significance of various rituals, the purpose being that they cleanse the body and the mind. Among these directives are the visits to holy places dotted over the entire country, taking bath in sacred rivers and uttering constantly the glorious names of God taught by wise leaders. Through ignorance or not realising the consequences, we pollute such places. Such duties will certainly yield results, if we acquire knowledge

through sincere efforts of the import of the sayings of Godly persons.

These spiritual guides have pointed out that the good and bad experienced by us become part of our lives only when we come in contact with natural situations of the world. The success or failure in our lives depends on the conduct of individuals. The utterances of saintly persons will enable us to adhere to divine commands and avoid pitfalls.

One of the simple methods these wise men have prescribed is to name our children after different Gods, so that when we call them, we may be reminded of the benefits we had derived from the Almighty. A Divine name is not composed of mere empty letters. It is a link between God and man. It has been framed after deep investigations and scientific analysis by the religious guides. Sometimes, the meanings of such names can be traced to the outpourings of these mystics. The ancient Tamil work Tholkappiam containing the sayings of saints refers to innumerable qualities of Gods packed in the names and given to us in a capsule form.

In a lecture on the message of Saivite saints delivered through Thevaram, their Tamil hymns, Dr. V. Rathnasabapathy said, naming a child may look an ordinary affair but in our tradition, elders used to choose an auspicious day and consult seasoned men. When children take the names of Gods those who fondle them or beckon them will be indirectly in touch with the Divine beings. So, too is the solace we derive by visiting pilgrim centres. Each one of these places is associated with God's mercy to humanity when He appeared in the world in human form. By worshipping the idols in the temples in these places, we will recall how God had extended His guidance and help to His devotees. So too is the tradition of bathing in rivers, considered sacred. Sages have even prescribed the mantras to be uttered before taking holy dips. We should

imagine the presence of God in these Divine gifts to humanity. Saint Thirugnanasambandar was greatly attracted by the flowing waters of river Cauvery at a place near Thiruvaiyaru and has mentioned about the bliss derived when taking bath before dawn.

March 30, 1994

Self-control, taller than mountain 12.27

Which is taller than a mountain, greater than the earth and vaster than the ocean? These perplexing questions were raised by a Chola King (12th century A.D) to his court poet, who was not able to reply to them immediately. But his son, with his permission, answered them, won the ruler's admiration and appreciation and was later appointed as his Chief Minister. This wise man was Sekkhizhar who had authored one of the most inspiring biographies, "Peria Puranam", which details the lives of the 63 Saivaite apostles who adored Lord Siva, in their divine outpourings.

Sekkhizhar was enabled and inspired to present this work by the Lord Himself. The deep faith of these "Nayanmars" sustained them to face the worst of problems but emerge safely. The answers were the grandeur of a consistently virtuous man who exercises self-control stood taller than the mountain; timely help, though small, extended to the needy is greater than the earth and the value of such help, rendered by one who has not counted the cost and the likely recompense when assessed, was vaster than the ocean.

Explaining them commentators point out that it is impossible to measure the greatness of a truly humble man with self-restraint, who does not deviate from the path of rectitude. A favour conferred in times of extreme expediency,

irrespective of its nature is larger than the world. What distinguishes the assistance so given is the generosity and spontaneity accompanying it, without anticipating any return.

"Peria Puranam" depicts the lives of holymen who remembered God even while going about their duties. They were luminaries, with graciousness and they believed in service, sacrifice and truth, said Pandit V. Natesan in a lecture, Sekkhizhar has left this treasure, inspired and guided by the grace of Lord Nataraja. The 63 saints belonged to different communities engaged in various types of professions. This monumental contribution is a document of Hindu religious history. Quite a few of these servitors of Siva made the regular reverent feeding of devotees, the well-trodden pathway to God.

The others were builders of temples, some undertook service in the shrines. Some of them were fanatics in the sense that they did not mind undergoing privations. For instance, Kannappar gouged out his eye to transplant it on that of the Lord's idol. These saints never sought favours from God but pleaded that they be admitted to the galaxy of His devotees. The saints, chronicled in "Peria Puranam", gave up meat, anger, theft, killing, pride, attachment and desire. They led austere lives, were ever cheerful, were householders but were ascetics in their hearts and in their thoughts, words and deeds.

June 16, 1994

God keeps company with the pious 12.28

If a question is raised where God can be seen, the simple reply, according to sacred books, is that He chooses to reside in the assembly of the pious and virtuous. To an extent,

this may also be the reason why some pilgrim centres and temples there attract people in large numbers though all shrines are held sacred. The basic message of Saivism is "God is Love". People should be honest, should not hate others, do service and refrain from harbouring jealousy towards anyone. It has been proved that if a sincere devotee climbs one rung on the spiritual ladder. God will descend many steps to receive him. He is compassionate like a mother lavishing all affection on her child. He chooses His messengers in establishing the Moral Order.

Among the four chief guides who propagated the glory of Siva through their hymns, one was a child prodigy, who started visiting temples at an unbelievably tender age and sang the praise of the deities there. That was Gnanasambandar. The collective hymns of the Saivaite saints, Thevaram, refer to the Lord's readiness to forgive the sins of His devotees . One of the fundamental instructions given by such holymen is that Siva being supreme, knows all needs of His devotees and hence will fulfil them. He is aware how and when they should receive His bounty. Hence devotees should never seek any benefaction. Their duty is to serve Him as instructed by Him.Realising that Gnanasambandar's music should be excellent and perfect in rhythm also, God gave him a pair of cymbals because the adorations should be set to fine tunes and the verses should be rhythmically superior and unexcelled.

Analysing the contents of one of the early outpourings of Thirugnanasambandar, Sri S.R. Themozhiyar, in a lecture, said that at Kolakka (near Sir-kazhi), he was touched by the piety of the residents because, though the place was prosperous, they were simple. They had opportunities to taste fish but they remained vegetarians. He extolled the deity in the temple there. God was so kind to the child-devotee that He later commanded the priests (in their dream) of the Arathural temple to take a palanquin for bringing Sambandar to His

presence. The saint, describing the form of Siva, says the crescent represented His mercy, ready to condone all shortcomings of devotees, the matted hair, His penance and the sacred ash, His purity. The hymn indicates how God would respond to their honest and sincere entreaties. The Lord Himself bestowed the name on His "son" (as Sambandar). The child-saint, who had begun his ministry at the age of three, sang songs conforming to the rigid rules of Tamil grammar and prosody. He did this only by Divine grace.

July 28, 1994

One can know God only through faith 12.29

Believers in God will not question the statements made in scriptural literature about the Supreme powers of God or the religious procedures prescribed in these texts. They will not doubt the explanations given by sages and saints on the intricacies of various doctrines. Spiritually eminent personages have also rendered commentaries about the conduct of various characters in the Epics and other sacred works. This cannot be called as exhibiting blind belief or that they lacked discrimination. It is due to their firm faith in the erudition and experience of elders that they have accepted and passed on to posterity, the real truth.

Such votaries of God did not indulge in profitless and vain speeches. They were aware that the elucidations to doubts in the realm of religion were based on declarations of numerous mystics and took them to be God's words conveyed through the distinguished men when they were engaged in austerities and meditation. Truth cannot be demonstrated but can only be intuited.

Those who demand proof about God's existence often question whether He has a real personality and whether it

is possible to see Him. They argue that only "seeing is believing". Different schools of religious thought have left valid theories about His omnipotence and have declared that He is beyond the comprehension of human intellect but His presence can surely be felt intuitively. Their claims about God's existence have stemmed out of the application of the five-fold arguments based on moral, cosmological, theological, mystical and ontological proofs and their conclusion based on study, logic and experience. Hence their declarations can stand the test of time.

In the 13th century, a servant of the Lord, Meikkandar, expounded a theory of evolution of the universe, according to which five elements constitute the orderly system of its working and left clear proof for God's existence, said Dr. V. Rathnasabapathy in a lecture. These doctrines are embedded in the saints' work, Sivagnana Botham. A seed sown in a soil, however fertile it may be, will not sprout unless watered. All creations in the world originate from God and take re-births by virtue of their past deeds, good or evil. Even as the making of a clay pot needs the raw materials, implements and the deft hands of the artisan, God's grace is the supporting force to all living beings. Sincere efforts are needed to receive His grace, points out Meikkandar. Sivagnana Botham expounds the tenets of Saiva Siddhanta.

November 10, 1994

Saints revered for their detachment 12.30

The respect and veneration that men of God command from people is not merely because of their age, erudition, wisdom, fame of wealth. Prahlada (in the Bhagavatham) was blessed with a vision of God when he was a child. What distinguishes them are achievements in the spiritual realm, which laymen cannot even think of attempting. Also, they

will not be affected by the constant concern that ordinary men experience, viz, fear of death. Indeed their regret will be that they have taken birth and so are afraid of rebirths. The Periapuranam, a Tamil classic contains the biographies of 63 saints, whose deeds reveal the common feature of selfless love for humanity and an inborn spirit of service and sacrifice. They were all aware of their goal and led simple, pious and pure lives.

These saints (Nayanmars) were free from the three types of attachments with which a common man is usually afflicted. The first relates to the affection he develops and retains towards his spouse. Secondly, he is ever desirous of accumulating wealth and lastly, he cultivates blind affection for his children. A story about sage Narada relates, how while crossing a river, a flash flood was about to wash his family away and when a situation arose to decide whom to discard, he preferred to rescue his wife.

Sri C. Swaminathan in a discourse, referred to the Rig-Veda in which a statement says that God is one, while He has many names and forms. An adage points out, that ancient people offered worship to Vishnu in the morning, praying that their activities for the day should be successful and adored Siva in the evenings for protection and peace essential for making them fit for next day's work. Among the 18 main Puranas, ten deal with Siva, who is pleased even with simple devotional gestures and grants boons generously. An episode relates how a rat, which accidentally jumped on a lamp in the sanctum of Vedaranyam temple and thereby caused the wick to glow brightly, was born as an emperor.

Saint Thirunavukkarasar treated even precious gems like diamonds and pearls as mere stones, mentions the Peria Puranam, to demonstrate his disinterestedness in wealth. While cleaning the precincts of a temple, a task which was dear to him,

God tested him by throwing the valuables. But he picked and threw them in a dust bin. Saint Thiruneelakantar, who was married at the age of 21 was compelled to remain separated from his wife for a long time but maintained his moral purity. A chieftain and his wife sacrified their only child to honour a guest, who demanded a dish made of human flesh. Siva, the visitor in disguise admiring their devotion restored their child to them. The examples reveal that the saints spent their lives in total detachment.

February 11, 1995

Overcome obstacles with tenacity of mind 12.31

Innumerable will be the situations when a person will be bewildered by unexpected impediments in reaching the goal he has set for himself. What is required of a man is not to get disheartened by such unanticipated challenges but face them with his will power and resume his endeavour. The project that he hopes to succeed in, may meet with hurdles which may demoralise him, not allowing him even to reflect and overcome the obstacles.

This is particularly true of one, who is engaged in his daily worship when there may be disturbance from some quarters. He should not yield to such distractions but should he be compelled to attend to such intrusions, he should come back and continue his meditation and worship. This is possible if he is firm and sincere in his efforts to reach his target.

The episode in Kanda Puranam, (the work dealing with the life and glory of Lord Subramania), where Lord Siva

remained unruffled by the attempts by Cupid to disturb His peace conveys how to overcome obstacles. Another scriptural story refers to the manner the Lord punished the God of Death and saved a young devotee, who held to His feet.

Episodes similar to these are intended to tell devotees that no one excepting God can conquer desires and that He has no birth or death. He is beginningless and endless. Even scholars, pundits and the aged have yielded to temptations, but God alone can resist any such move.

Sri Sukhi Sivam in a discourse, referred to some people dismissing some of the actions of God interspersed in sacred texts as fictitious or fantasies of a few lazy men. But they do not realise that every episode has a moral, which however requires to be understood by a proper study.

Written long ago, these Epics and Puranas gathered a lot of additional material over several generations, some of them appearing frivolous to some critics. But when the truth is unfolded, devotees will find valuable messages. The unwanted details should be discarded and the embedded core should be assimilated like taking the kernel, and rejecting the chaff. This can be likened to a precious gift sent by a friend from a distant place by post. It will naturally be packed well. The recipient should remove the packaging material and then take the gift.

The scriptures impress on us not be lured by the worldly influences. The penance of Parvathi at a young age, despite stern warnings, instruct us about the need to pursue religion from young age so that problems in later years, can be faced easily. Siva's role as a teacher also remind us that silence is a valuable vehicle to search for the inner consciousness.

March 24, 1995

Keep the Senses under control 12.32

Sacred texts lay emphasis on the need to exercise control over the sense organs as they exert powerful influence, making man succumb to them. This warning can be administered easily by anyone but it is extremely difficult to put into practice. Saints who are still among us have shown the way to avoid their stranglehold. Aspirants can draw the necessary inspiration from them and gradually avoid indulging in bad ways. This may not be difficult, because with earnestness a person can remain uninfluenced by temptations.

The benign acts of religious guides have proved that they possess enormous spiritual powers, acquired through severe austerities. There is mention of a country suffering from continuous drought for 12 years experiencing heavy downpour when a sage from a lonely spot was invited to fetch relief to the people.

Even in present times such miracles do occur when great men visit us, thus adding testimony to the statements in ancient books that they are not fictituous. In a temple a devotee usually offers worship individually to a variety of deities, but as a Guru retains the powers of all Gods, adoring him will be equally beneficial. He will extend his compassion and grace to those who come to him.

The disciples in turn should know the purpose of their births and the means to achieve the same. Saint Arunagirinathar explains that man should never go about aimlessly. The anxiety of saintly souls being the establishment of righteousness. they will prescribe measures to correct humanity and one among them is the need to keep strict vigil over the sense organs.

How men can be trapped by the tentacles of these powerful senses has been illustrated by the behaviour of animals and

insects, said Sri Sukhi Sivam in a lecture. Attracted by the fleshy worm stuck to an iron hook, the fish gets duped, bites it, suffers injury and dies.

Men may watch this sitting on the banks of a river, but they may not realise that they may also meet their ends in a similar way. A bee which enjoys suckling honey from flowers forgets that it will perish when the petals close. A rare bird which likes the music of a flute, gets deceived when a hunter plays it and jumps into the fire lit by him. A tusker falls into a pit when it approaches a she-elephant stationed nearby to lure it. A glow-worm unaware of the heat, leaps into the burning light.

They get lost by the influence of taste, smell, sound, lust and light. One can imagine how a man will behave when all the five senses extend their grip on him. Spiritual guides caution him about such dangers.

June 22, 1995

Human birth must be utilised properly 12.33

This precious human life is invariably wasted by many because they go about without any aim. On the other hand, it is necessary for everyone to take a firm decision to think good, to act in a positive manner and do only noble deeds. While political activity may result in creating divisive tendencies, and scientific development may often be used for destructive purposes, religion will unite men and make them Godly and divert their attention towards the goal of salvation. Men should act entirely different from animals and birds which have no sense of discriminating power.

The spiritual way of life will mean that those resorting to the path of devotion should associate themselves with men of piety, visit temples and seek Divine grace to help them swim across this sea of transmigration. While it is extremely difficult to acquire Divine qualities and conduct oneself in accordance with the moral codes, bad thoughts will enter into a man's mind quickly without any invitation.

Evil tendencies will lead a man on the wrong path. A typical example of the quick influence of the negative forces is the business carried out by a person selling liquor. People will flock to his shop. On the other hand, a person selling butter milk will have to seek buyers.

To inculcate discipline and aid devotion, in ancient days lectures used to be arranged in temples daily so that listeners will carry with them only pious thoughts. The eyes gifted by God should enjoy the vision of God (residing in idols), the hands should offer flowers and worship Him; the tongue should always praise God and the head bow at His feet.

All these exercises should be started in one's early life because there is no guarantee that one's faculties will be alert in later life. Should not man then prepare himself to surrender to God? He should place his heart at the feet of God pleading with all sincerity to enlighten him.

These sentiments which find expression in the numerous verses of Saint Arunagirinathar in his Thiruppugazh in praise of Muruga (Lord Subramania) were explained by Sri Mathivannan in a lecture. The poet, philosopher and saint distinguished himself in his outpourings which contain the essence of the teachings of the hymns of other great composers.

He has described how one can experience bliss. The torrential flow of words from his mouth is itself a proof that it can

only be a gift of God because no human agency has the capacity to compose such glorious poems. The saint had toured from Haridwar to Kathirgamam, awakening the spiritual power in men.

November 22, 1995

God, source of all worldly activities 12.34

The knowledge of science gained by modern men make them find out the cause for the events which take place around them. There should be some force that is responsible for the changes which occur. Spiritualists see a superior power controlling the happenings, like the sun rising and setting and the sea being contained within the shore. Even assimilation of knowledge is controlled by that power. Many students are trained by the same teacher but only a few perform well in the examinations. After securing knowledge of these issues, men proceed to the next enquiry-as to the nature of this power - and come to realise that God is the source.

It is hence necessary to acquire spiritual knowledge which will enable men to understand their own nature as well as that of God and realise their relationship with that infinite and immortal power and His qualities. The knowledge so obtained should make them realise that religion and philosophy are not the same. The latter specifies the broad principles governing the conduct of man and spells out the steps to be taken to realise God whereas religion refers to the actual method of implementing the guidelines and translating them into action. The comparison between the two is like a person visiting a temple with devotion without being concerned about

the nature of the deity he worships and that of knowing why he has come there and what is the nature of the deity and the purpose of choosing this particular form. What is essential for an aspirant is to know the "Philosphy of Religion." This aspect has been explained in the Kumara Sthavam of Pamban Swamigal, a saint of recent years who followed the path of "Suddha(Pure) Adwaita".

The message in this hymn adoring Muruga (Subramania seated on his mount, peacock) is that "God is Love" and that He resides in us and we in Him and that He is ever ready to shower His grace on His devotees. For the Swamigal, Siva and Subramania are not different, said Prof. V. Rathnasabapathy in a lecture on the significance of the hymn. Saivism and Vaishnavism were the two paths adopted by saints, who in their poems have described their ecstasy and their experience of Divine Bliss. The branches like Saivam and Kowmaram relate the manifestations of the Supreme.

Saiva Siddhanta explains how the soul is deluded by ignorance and enjoins it to realise its identity with the Supreme Being through knowledge and devotion. The grace of God, awareness of the Self and of his relationship with God, enable man to get rid of the taints and proceed to the summit of God-realisation. A devotee should know that God loves him and has protected him through so many of his births.

February 19, 1997

Saintly company elevates man 12.35

One of the methods to develop devotion and to keep the mind cleansed of impurities to fix one's constant attention

on God suggested by the scriptural texts, is to get closely associated with men of piety. Remaining in their midst will ensure that the mind does not go astray and that all discussions will only be centred round the Almighty and His deeds. More important than seeking the company of God-men is to avoid the presence of evil forces as they will corrupt the mind. An example to stress this aspect is to point out that consumption of milk is good for a person but in its absence, he cannot resort to taking a cup of liquor, as a substitute.

How to identify such God-centred devotees with whom an aspirant can associate with? They will be the same as others and they may be discharging their obligations like others. But inwardly, their thoughts will be on God and their actions dedicated to Him and they will be serving God. Their conduct will be exemplary and their interest will be to guide those who are eager to get over the worldly influences. They themselves will be unaffected by earthly considerations. Association with such men will be a guarantee for an aspirant to get insulated from worldly attractions.

These sentiments are contained in one of the verses of Abhirami Andadi, a hymn rendered by a saint who was in the midst of humanity not long ago, who demonstrated that the Divine Couple will always extend their protection to devotees. The behaviour of this noble man, who was deeply attached to the Divine Mother in the temple at Thirukkadaiyur (Tamil Nadu) was not understood by laymen who mistook him for a recluse. An occasion arose when his casual statement had to be proved as it was totally at variance with facts. Goddess Abhirami enabled him to emerge victorious from the test and his sublime verses echo profound religious truths. He was known as Abhirami Bhattar.

Explaining the verses, Sri Sukhi Sivam in a lecture said some who showed devotion, were enlightened when they were

guided by such saintly men. Abhirami Bhattar describes Goddess as the bestower of wealth and wisdom and refers to the incantations forming part of the Sri Vidya exercises to invoke Her grace. Not only human beings but even celestials vie with one another to seek Her glance, he adds. The saint prays ardently that Her effulgent form should always remain enshrined in his heart. He pleads with Her to help in flushing out the unwanted thoughts as he was kept amidst worldly activities. His life reminds devotees how faith in God will help them to cross hurdles and become "Sriman" a term used in the Ramayana to portray Lakshmana's sincere service to Rama, God-incarnate.

April 2, 1997

Realisation of Supreme Being 13.1

Among the innumerable and varied portrayals of the Supreme Being in our scriptural lore, one depicts Him as a farmer, describing how he tills the ground, removes weeds, takes precautions to prevent stray cattle from grazing and ultimately while harvesting, sits near the field unmindful of the climate.

The Epics and Puranas act as the pesticides to sift Dharma from unrighteousness and the hymns of the spiritual guides serve as barriers to deny entry of vicious thoughts. Still laymen, spiritually infirm as they have not acquired knowledge, may feel it impossible to reach God straight. God may indeed extend them the help but they on their turn may not be in a position to make use of it properly, even as a needy person will feel bewildered when he is presented with a herd of elephants as he will have neither the capacity nor the power to control them. But trained elephants will be found to hand over voluntarily the iron chain to their masters, knowing that they are to be bound by their masters. God has given the bond of "Bhakti" to enable a sincere devotee to realise Him. Also, like the same animal bending its knees to help a man climb on its back, a penitent who holds to the feet of Lord and offers his total surrender (Prapatti) is sure to attain His abode.

In his discourse Sri Mukkur Lakshminarasimhachariar referred to God's compassion towards His own creations by His manifestations amongst them directly or through consecrated idols. He also resides in the heart of every individual. To help the devotee to experience His presence inwards, several methods are prescribed, one of them being the recitation of His glorious traits. The scriptural texts like the Mahabharatha, particularly the "Sahasranama" showered by a great devotee, when chanted will make one enjoy the Bliss.

April 29, 1978.

Avarice leads to ruin 13.2

A person becomes rich either by inheritance or by self-earning, but the tendency in general, is not to remain contented but to possess all that one can as soon as possible. In the course of such a temptation, some may not even hesitate to commit unlawful acts to achieve their desires. The insatiable greed to amass wealth, the eagerness to consume delicious dishes, the inclination to befriend women and to drink intoxicating beverages are the chief causes for the destruction of man. Greed is like a flame which can reduce to ashes any quantity of hard wood, if not nipped in the bud, it will annihilate the avaricious. Two parables serve to bring out the consequences of greed, one from Jain scriptures and the other from Panchatantra, according to Muni Sri Rajyash Vijayaji in his discourse. Three young men and an elderly person travelling through a jungle came across an ant hill. Under it was a treasure of silver, guarded by a cobra. Disregarding the elder's advice, the youth killed the reptile and carried the booty with them. A little ahead, a similar ant hill with a treasure of gold was found and again, despite the old man's warning, the youth killed the cobra and took away the bundle of yellow metal, with a feeling of joy that they had grown richer. But when they came across a third treasure of gems, they were fatally bitten by a giant-sized cobra. The elder one who managed to escape, retrived the entire treasure and spent it for charitable purposes. A fox in a forest was lucky to find a hunter and a peacock lying dead and was happy that it could get enough food for winter. But in its anxiety to satisfy its immediate appetite, it tried to chew the string of the hunter's bow, when the string forcibly hit the animals, resulting in its death. Contentment alone can fetch peace and happiness while desire can lead to a man's ultimate ruin.

January 21, 1980.

Sine qua non of a spiritual aspirant 13.3

The majority of people call themselves believers in God. They visit temples, read religious texts, listen to discourses and observe religious practices and feel satisfied. However, it is for each one of them to judge how far his varied day-to-day activities conform to his faith, in the existence of the all-pervading and all knowing God. There is another class of people, rationalists, who dispute the existence of God. They are guided purely by "reason". As a matter of fact, "reason" and "faith" are like the two eyes of a person. Both are necessary for acquisition of true knowledge and wisdom. The spiritual aspirant should have his feet firm on the strong and secure foundation of faith.

The doubting and questioning Narendran, who later came to be known as Swami Vivekananda, was completely transformed by Sri Ramakrishna. The illustrious disciple came to regard his master as a Divine incarnation. All rationalists cannot have the rare good fortune that Narendran had. Hence, the importance and relevance of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings to the rationalists. The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, who experienced the presence of God, have a massage for the believers too. The Bengali saint only re-discovered and re-interpreted the eternal truths handed down to mankind by the ancient seers and sages of India. The incidents in his life confirmed the spiritual experiences and exhortations of those venerable sages.

Swami Tapasyananda, in a discourse said that because of his proximity (Ramakrishna lived in the last century), and the fact that incidents in his life were duly recorded by those who observed him from close quarters, Sri Ramakrishna is specially relevant to modern times. He laid stress on the fundamental unity of all religions and his ideas accommodated the different schools of philosophy.

March 18, 1983

Self-centred modern man has no inward peace 13.4

The modern man, under the impact of western civilisation, is crazy about accumulating a variety of goods to make himself happy. Hence earning more and more money becomes an obsession with him. But the pity is, even after acquiring them, he continues to remain dissatisfied. He does not experience a sense of fulfilment, a feeling of joy. He possesses many things, but lacks the most important inward peace and quiet. His mind is always restless.

The habits, values and the life-style of the people have undergone a sea change in the last two or three generations. Our dwelling places are no longer happy homes filled with spiritual aroma and characterised by elders associating every activity with God and the young ones imbibing that bent of mind from childhood. In those bygone days, no one partook of anything before it was offered to the Lord. Every thing was God's "prasad". The entire family remained happy and contented. Those days, the people were not educated in the formal sense, but were knowledgeable; they knew what contributed to happiness and peace. Their lives were marked by simple living and high thinking and they shared their belongings with others. But, the educated modern man, highly self-centred, has not learnt how to be happy with himself and make others happy. Disappointed and dejected, he visits several places to get relief from stress and pain. All that he gets is only temporary titillation.

Sri Krishna Premi, in a discourse said one can get real peace and happiness only when one turned to God and sought the company of the pious and virtuous. If a person repeatedly

listened to the narration of the lives of exalted persons marked by simplicity and unselfishness, he would be irresistibly attracted to them.

January 7, 1984

The five evils man should keep off 13.5

Man suffers because of his own Senses. By yielding to temptations, he continues to be in bondage. Each Sense exerts tremendous pressure on him and the result of their combined attack can very well be imagined. "Listening" can do harm in the same way as the deer is exposed to danger when it lifts its earlobes hearing a noise and runs about. By the "touch" of the female, the male elephant gets excited and is caught by the hunter. The moth which "sights" the flame is attracted to it and it perishes by falling into it. "Taste" draws the fish to the bait. The "smell" of honey attracts the bee and its legs stick to the fluid as it sits on it. The cumulative effect of all these evils is that man is unable to escape from worldliness and is ever held in bondage. There is still a way out. A boat may float but care should be taken to see that water does not get into it through any hole.

Man can throw away his shackles by seeking the help of a spiritual guide, who out of compassion, will prescribe the steps. By adhering to them the aspirant can realise the truth within, feel the presence of the Supreme and ultimately reach the transcendental stage. Religion being the manifestation of Divinity within, each one has to seek it by himself. It is comparable to a patient taking the medicine to cure himself of the disease and not someone else. Also a person should

himself see the full moon rising in the horizon to enjoy the scene. Even as the geologist locates gold or oil in the substratum with an instrument, the preceptor will help his disciple to identify the line of approach and the aspirant will have to dig out the truth himself. Once he does this, he overcomes worldliness and cultivates discipline, and can enjoy bliss within.

In a discourse Swami Ranganadananda explained that the study of spiritual texts like Viveka Choodamani will enable a person to snap worldly ties. When this is done, he will be contented even if poor, derive moral courage even if physically weak and treat all creations as equal.

August 3, 1984

Choose your God, but never hate others 13.6

One of the glorious aspects of Hinduism is the emphasis on the Doctrine of "Unity in Diversity." No one is compelled to worship a particular deity; each is free to choose a God. Having made his choice, he is asked to repose total confidence in His dispensation and be steadfast in his devotion to Him, whether in adversity or prosperity. It may be that in times of distress, the devotee may be tempted to see boons from elsewhere but this should be avoided. At the same time, the scriptures say God is one and there is no difference between, His various manifestations. How then is man to reconcile the two apparently contradictory theories?

It is agreed that a devotee should be attached to his personal God like an ideal wife dependent on her husband alone. But, at the same time, being loyal and affectionate

towards him does not mean that she should displease, or disobey, insult or be hostile towards his kith and kin. In fact, her affectionate treatment of his relatives and service to them will gladden her husband. Likewise, a devotee should never denigrate Gods other than those Whom he worships. On the other hand, his personal God will feel pleased if he respects other deities. In the same manner, a person has to adhere strictly to the teachings of his spiritual guide but this does not imply that he should show animosity towards equally great religious leaders.

Thus one who has offered his surrender to a particular God should maintain a balance of judgment and never be antagonistic towards others. The Saivite saints, in their hymns, have not referred to Lord Vishnu and the Azhwars have not made any mention of Lord Siva in their verses but there is not even a tinge of mutual recrimination. This is the message spelt out through the Daksha episode in the Bhagavatham.

In his discourse Sri N. Neelabala Sarma referred to the several methods of devotion prescribed in the texts. Each one of them is equally efficacious and a devotee adopting any one of them can experience the presence of God. His devotion should enable him to be taken gradually nearer God and the ultimate in the process is, to yearn for merger with Him.

February 8, 1985

Man's sacred duty is to obey God 13.7

Human reason, unaided and unsupported by scriptures, cannot take man very far. He cannot pull himself in this world by his own bootstraps. He needs Divine grace, which is there always, but his foolishness does not raise the sails

to receive it from God. Unless we are base ingrates, we should love God because we belong to Him. His, then, is the right to command us. Ours, is the sacred duty to obey whether He speaks to us directly or makes His will conveyed to us through scriptures or His messengers. Some shrink from making an appeal to God for the fear that it may fall on unheeding ears. This is the danger of atheism.

It is the inherent nature of the turbulent to feel proud and lock up their sorrows, refusing to bring them before the Almighty. To acquire amiability and imbibe charity, we should repose confidence in God. His grace raises our drooping faith in moral values, gives us the nerve to take up new endeavours and strengthens our perseverance. Faith is the only solvent which can help us to live sanely. But Faith is not belief without proof; it is trust without any reservation. Singleness of mind gears us on the purpose of life and secures concentration.

In a discourse, Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao said the physical basis of human life, the lure of the Senses, emotional upheavals, changes in circumstances and the irresolute nature of human will as well as its fickleness, have been taken into account by the Lord in His message to posterity. Worldly temptations and the threat of violence will make men give up their convictions. The Lord says "Do not yield to this unmanliness". This imperative is the most important among the 60 commands which God has given to set right the faltering humanity in general. Religion is a force. The potential good in men can become dynamic only when we make an effort to put down the lethal elements which coexist within him. Devotees who analyse God's message discern in it the fundamental tenets of a liberal religion, acceptable to all because it is catholic in its outlook, comprehensive in its scope and concrete in its treatment of human problems.

January 27, 1987

Justice is truth in action 13.8

We may juggle with man-made laws and try to fool human courts but there is one judgment that comes from the "unseen" for which there is no appeal. There is no virtue so great and God-like, as 'Justice'. The four pillars of a Government are religion, justice, good counsel and treasure. Justice is like the kingdom of God; it is within us, as a great yearning. It is 'truth' in action. He who rules over men should hence be just and honest.

While revenge may be described as the action of an individual against another who committed a wrong, punishment is resorted to by society against one who has transgressed its laws. Most of the terms designated as crimes or offences in Sanskrit are essentially religious in nature. No strict line can be drawn between sins and punishable offences. The ancient law books contain lists of crimes and their methods of perpetration. How the law-givers dealt with those who indulged in these offences is also spelt out, ranging from cutting a finger initially upto severing the head when a person turns incorrigible, Pandit V. Natesan said in a discourse

The Laws codified by Manu give the details of judicial administration. The cow has been held sacred and hence its killing has been made a crime. Generations of rulers followed Manus Laws strictly and people felt satisfied that the real culprits were severely dealt with. A Chola king, "Ezhaaran" who lived in Thiruvarur was an ardent upholder of Justice and follower of Manu's Dharmasastras. Hence he was affectionately called "Manu Needi Cholan". To render justice to people who felt they were wronged, he caused a huge bell to be hung in front of his palace. When someone desired to seek his help, all that he had to do was to pull the rope, making the bell sound and attract the attention of the ruler. Once, to his surprise, he noticed a cow seeking

Justice through this process. The culprit was his own son who had run the chariot over the calf of the complainant-cow. It was the king's duty to render Justice to the animal too and he ordered the prince to lie on the road and had his chariot driven personally, to crush the latter. There were showers of praise for his daring act.

August 31, 1988

Moral treatise akin to the Bhagavad Gita 13.9

The thoughts of a person, the words which he utters and the deeds he performs should all be identical. But usually, he plans in his mind to carry out a particular scheme but when he specifies the same to others, he will invariably say the exactly opposite, either to deceive the other or deliberately misinform him. If by chance, a person speaks out as he thinks, he may not act in accordance with what has been indicated. His very deed may result in baffling situations. Only a hypocrite can act without any hesitation, flouting all canons of morality.

The symbol of virtue, Vidhura cautioned the blind king Dhritarashtra that the land he governed was not legitimately his and hence it should be handed over to his brother's sons, the Pandavas. Only those who have committed a wrong will not be able to sleep comfortably and Vidhura pleaded with the king to see that the legitimate share due to the Pandavas was returned, when, he would definitely enjoy peace of mind. But these words fell on deaf ears.

Sri Vishwapriya Thirtha Swami in his discourse on "Vidhura Needhi," which is a treatise on the Law of Morality,said this

was akin to the "Bhagavad Gita" of the Lord. All aspects of human conduct have been analysed and Vidhura pointed out how a man should lead a life of purity. Vidhura said that the Pandavas were least interested in getting the issue settled on the war field and even Bhima the most vehement among them, talked of the repercussions of bloody battle. But Draupadi, who could never reconcile herself to the ill-treatment meted out to her in a public assembly by the mischievous elements declared that even should her husbands decide to keep off the war path, she would settle the score by taking her sons help and wreak vengeance. Vidhura urged the king not to adopt a diabolic stance and cited the instance of the reeds on the banks bending fully and escaping the wrath of the floods while huge trees being uprooted because their soil holding the roots got eroded. Vidhura referred to the harm that a society suffered because of one man's fault and gave the example of Ravana. He asked him not to be under the misapprehension and false hope that even if the Pandavas win the war, the righteous Yudhishtirar would handover the reins of administration back to him.

August 31, 1988

The Yoga connected to five cardinal virtues 13.10

From time immemorial, all the great, awakened and enlightened spiritual guides had given only one message -- at all times and anywhere -- to mankind, viz., of fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. The human being, the highest rung of all creations, is basically the same everywhere. All are born the same way, receive all the bounties of nature in a similar manner, have the same inner and outer construction and are controlled by the same power -- God though called differently. They are all members of God's family.

India's ancient "mantram" - "Vasudaiva Kutumbakam" lays down the principle that entire world is one family. But it is common knowledge that despite long and loud preachings by various religious and social leaders professing the unity of man, the world today is torn by strife and tension. The root cause of the sorrow spectacle is that the gospel of the unity of man, however well-accepted in theory, is not put into practice. It remains at best as a mere slogan. It is also accepted that the purpose for which this human body has been provided, is to aim at the union of the soul with the Cosmic Soul -- God. This is achieved by Yoga, one of the various methods, which attempts to bring the two close. The yogic system is one of the six schools of Indian philosophy systematised by sages and saints to set in order, the Indian thought concerning the Cosmos and relationship between man and God.

Sant Rajinder Singh, spiritual head of Sawan Kirpaul Ruhani Mission (Delhi) said here that God is one and the way back to Him is also one. The Surat Shabd (Sound) Yoga is an easier form when compared with other systems, all of which call for severe discipline. Every prospective initiate to the Shabd Yoga (which he imparts) should endeavour to adopt and cultivate five cardinal virtues -- Ahimsa (non-violence), Sathya (adherence to Truth), Brahmacharya (continence), universal love and selfless service to mankind. They should also practise the three purities -- diet, livelihood and conduct.

December 29, 1990

Guru makes overcoming problems easier 13.11

Many think that those who lead a spiritual life are selfish and are after comfort. This misconception can be removed

by a comparison. Both a surgeon and a person who wants to kill, use knives in their respective professions. For the former it is a tool to save a patient while the latter, it is a weapon to deprive another of his life. Likewise, though the life-force is the same in all, spiritual aspirants utilise it to go through a selfless and disciplined existence to realise God and Truth whereas worldly-minded men will be keen on getting their desires satiated. God realisation can arise only out of elimination of selfishness. An enlightened person will perform all actions in a dedicated spirit which the pleasure-seeker will find it impossible to do.

Disinfectants may remove superficial germs but cannot destroy the more powerful ones, which cause fatal diseases. We can somehow eliminate the gross tendencies lurking in the mind but the subtle ones which get lodged in the subconscious mind require greater efforts to root out. This is possible with the help of a spiritual guide who will see that the wicked tendencies are wiped out.

We find time to satisfy our various types of desires which involve us in great suffering and ultimately culminate in dissatisfaction. Even for minor sickness, we run to a medical man but never seek advice or treatment of the supreme Doctor -- God, for the chronic disease of repeated births, presuming that to go to Him is not necessary. We may spend money and time to resort to litigation in a court over a tiny piece of land but not keen on sparing a few minutes in the company of pious and holy men. Those who thirst for redemption from re-births will be few indeed.

Some may not like the idea of accepting another as a spiritual teacher, humbling themselves or undergoing discipline and if necessary, correction. But whatever a preceptor may ask them to do will only be with the intention of moulding or purifying their mind and inculcating discipline. Even as

a blacksmith hammers a shapeless lump of iron on an anvil always keeping in mind the product he wants to make out of it, so too a religious guide will be planning as how to train his disciples. Even then, one may say that realisation can be had without the aid of a mediator. It will be possible, provided one has a pure mind from birth. In Kashmir apples flourish due to climate and soil but the same will not thrive on the plains. Even if their growth is made possible here, their quality and quantity will suffer said Mata Amritanandamayi in a speech. An aspirant can avoid pitfalls and can gain moral strength and power through the guidance of a guru.

May 6, 1993

Start and end the day with God 13.12

God has a masterplan and we have our role to play. Bondage and freedom, pleasure and pain, birth and death, gain and loss are mental creations. When we transcend these pairs of opposites, we will not be reborn. It is the physical body that persists and returns. We should carry out all our actions in a detached way in a spirit of dedication to the divine. Then these actions will not bind us, says Swami Sivananda. He asks men to spiritualise all their activities and to feed the mind with thoughts of God, their hearts with purity.

One has to remember how in a second, thousands of human beings are born in this world. Who decides their destiny? Why and how do they appear in various strata? Scriptures say that the last thoughts of a dying person govern his future and determine his birth. A licentious man will have his last thoughts on the worldly pleasures he has enjoyed, of a liquor-addict about his joys, a soldier of his enemy, and a mother deeply attached to her only son about him and

a man steeped in religious activities, about God. In the Bhagavatam, this theme is elaborated in the story of Jadabharata who out of mercy took care of a fawn, got attached to it and ultimately was born as a deer.

To the person who has disciplined his mind, all thoughts throughout the life will be pinned on God. This habit of retaining God's vision amid routine work cannot be cultivated during one day. It requires struggle, will power and determination. That is why man is asked to be spiritually inclined throughout, as that alone will make him remember God. For this, simple methods have been prescribed, such as reciting God's names, listening to expositions of holy books and closely associating with people of virtue and integrity so that at the time of death, one will think of God. He may not be re-born at all or he may be caused to appear as a Godly person. Swami Sivananda's plan to train God-realisation is "Start the day with God, end the day with God, fill the day with God and that is the way to God (Heaven)."

In a lecture, Swami Vimalananda said that apart from the time of rising from or retiring to bed, a person can meditate on God's forms or chant His names whenever possible thereby ensuring that base thoughts do not creep into the mind. Then the last thoughts, because of his constant remembrance, will also be on the Almighty's lotus feet. When a person meditates and when he develops virtues, a spiritual road gets laid in his mind, and anxieties vanish.

July 16, 1993

There is moral in every move of God 13.13

Some of the episodes in our religious literature seem to project, at times even highlight, baffling situations. Thinkers of modern era are not able to understand their significance

and so decry them. For instance, while the Almighty visited the world on a number of occasions, to render justice to the pious from the tortures unleashed on them by wicked elements, how could He defy the tradition of residing with one spouse but sport with many women. Valid explanations had been given for such events.

At the time when this great sport took place, the Lord in human form, was a child. There was no amorous motive, as a few ridicule. The women who rushed to listen to Krishna's music which flowed through the flute and their behaviour, at that time displayed their absolute dependence on Him. The same men who try to distort facts, will have no answer about the incident in which the same Divine child destroyed many evil forces as for instance, the serpent which was causing havoc to the people who resided in the nearby area (by emitting poisonous fumes).

The Lord takes incarnations at the request of devotees and during that period shows how men should conduct themselves. There is a moral in every move of the Almighty's and His concern to make people adhere to discipline. By listening to the exposition of the sacred texts, people's mind will be flushed out of the impurities.

No doubt, no man can escape sorrows and problems or be spared from grief but when anyone unhesitatingly offers himself to God declaring his helplessness. He will surely protect him. There are steps to approach Him. Even if elaborate procedures are beyond his means, he can show his sincere devotion as did the unlettered cowherd population display by seeking His feet unconcerned about happenings around them. Sins will be obliterated and bliss can be experienced by hearing the Lord's traits.

What God expects of those who seek His protection is their sincerity and intensity of devotion. Pleas in the nature

of mere business propositions like one saying that he would do worship should he be immediately repaid duly will not be proper, said Sri N. Babu Dikshitar in a discourse explaining how the unseen hands of God grant the wishes of His ardent devotees.

August 21, 1993

Nine flights of steps to altar of God 13.14

While elaborating the innumerable auspicious attributes of the Supreme Lord, scholars have explained that if a person displays his intense devotion and takes just a few steps forward towards the royal road to heaven, He will show His mercy and rush down from His throne and meet, greet and welcome him. In this connection, commentators also describe God's abode in detail and that a devotee can reach that place if he adopts certain methods. One of the religious works refer to the nine flights of steps to the altar of God. How he can ascend them and be at the celestial region beyond the Cosmos has been mentioned in 21 Tamil verses by Vedanta Desika in his Paramapada Sopanam.

In the first stage, the tormented soul acquires correct spiritual knowledge about his real nature and how to conduct himself so long as he remains in the world, adhering to the various injunctions. In the second step, he will understand about his present plight in this ephemeral existence and experiences a sense of frustration and contrition. This in turn will result in his cultivating a dislike for material and earthly ends, calculated to satisfy the cravings of the body. Then a great fear creeps into his soul. At this period, the person attempts not to lose his moorings but hopes to get

rid of the bondage. Next, he will seek the guidance of a spiritual master and get help to learn about the nature of the real, the goal, and how to reach there.

The way to obtain release is to offer one's total surrender and thereby obtain the grace of the Lord by which the worldly ties will get snapped. At the end of the life's journey, the soul travels through a definite route. After the final flight, the soul lands in the paradise and ultimately obtains eternal enjoyment. The Lord is then ready to lend him His hand and take him to His abode, said Sri B.T. Srinivasaraghavachariar in a discourse.

September 7, 1993

Perfection of man, aim of religions 13.15

The main aim of all religions is to make man perfect to the extent possible and to ensure that he leads a disciplined life conforming his worldly activities to the Moral Law. Obedience to holy men, uttering truth and acquiring spiritual knowledge knowing the purpose of his birth, are common to one and all. There are differences only in the procedures for achieving the goal. But all of them warn man of the evil forces which lurk within, ready to ruin him.

There are broadly four types of men -- those who may not externally look pious but who never swerve from the path of righteousness, some put on the robes of sobriety and humility but their conduct may be questionable; some forsake both, while a few renounce neither. Among the categories of children, some may turn out to be more virtuous than their parents, some evenly matched, some worthless, while a few may bring only disgrace to their families.

Likewise, meetings are of four kinds. With some, an encounter may be pleasant but their company may not be good, with some, the meeting may not be good, with some, the meeting may not be so palatable but their association may be enriching; in some both the company and meeting will be rewarding while in the last category are those whose very friendship and presence may be harmful.

Deception, fraud, falsehood and malpractices in trade are the four animal instincts which drag the soul to sub-human existence. Simplicity, humility, compassion and serenity are the four virtues which enable the soul to acquire human birth.

In his lecture on a selection of inspiring aphorisms from Jaina scriptures, Sri Dulichand Jain said, like the above-mentioned sutras yet another one refers to four types of people who are not worthy of equipping themselves with spiritual knowledge -- the vain, the greedy, the quarrelsome and the deceitful. Philanthropists are also of four types, some talk proudly of donating but do not give anything, some donate liberally but may not utter a word about it, some contribute as well as indulge in self-praise, while some others neither speak nor part with anything.

Like a cartman who intentionally leaves the highway preferring a rugged road repents when the axle breaks, so also, the ignorant person who transgresses the path or righteousness, will regret his defaults at the time of death. A snake is unable to give up its poisonous nature; so too, a person without good character though he may study innumerable scriptures, remains unable to shed his wicked nature. Right conduct is the essence of scriptures and is the Jina Dharma.

December 6, 1997

Training in Bhakti should begin in childhood 14.1

Devotion is not a matter of sentiment or emotion, but a scientific process for reaching God. First of all a person should realise that he like everybody else, is a "fragment" of the Supreme Being entangled in the material world and that the goal of his life is to get back to Him. Having understood this truth he must act in consonance with the eternal relationship. In reality. however what happens is that people, swathed in illusion (Maya) instead of trying to become servants of God turn slaves of ever so many others resulting in their being thrown into the ocean of suffering.

The person who has realised that he is but a part and parcel of God and that soul is different from the "body", can be likened to a patient who has reached the stage of convalescence. But there is yet the danger of the disease relapsing. So, he has to follow up his knowledge with positive steps to establish rapport with the Supreme Being, if he were to get completely cured of the disease of re-birth and attain liberation. For the devotee who had become totally attached to Sri Krishna the material world would be reduced to a "zero", said Sri Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder-Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

All limbs of the body were expected to obey instructions issued by the brain and, if any of them failed to do so, it only meant something was wrong with it. Sri Krishna had said "Surrender to Me" and it was everyone's duty to submit to His command. If anyone refused, the implication was he was afflicted with a "disease". Deemed to be one of the authorities on this Bhagavata Dharma, Prahlada gave lessons on it to his young friends. Training in Bhakti should begin

in one's childhood and it was foolish to think they could take to it when they became old, because there was no guarantee of their living for many more years.

January 5, 1976

Significance of meditation 14.2

To be born as a human being is a rare privilege as he is provided with the golden opportunity to sharpen his intellect and get inspired and enlightened. Man can make an endeavour to learn and achieve a goal. Otherwise, the purpose of his birth may be lost. The spiritual powers within should be awakened and directed towards obtaining the Divine Bliss. Life without an aim may be a waste as a diamond in the hands of a fisherman.

According to a parable, a fisherman seeing the stock of fish depleting in the place he usually angled, switched on to a new pond where he caught a bundle of stones. Not realising that they were pure gems, he allowed his son to play with them. The boy threw the "pebbles" one by one into the lake till one day, his mother thought of selling one or two to procure in return, family rations. Only the purchaser could assess their worth. Sages had laid down the ways to seek God and thus direct human activities for securing spiritual benefits. They prescribed meditation as a means to seek Truth but in the process, they had cautioned man not to collect garbage. Meditation is an integrated process to acquire Knowledge of the Brahman (The Absolute).

In a discourse, Swami Ishwarananda Giri of "Samvit Sadhanayana" (Mount Abu) explained how meditation was

a "Sadhana" to seek God. It could not be sold or purchased but it implied an approach consisting of Bhakti, Shradda, Dhyana and Yoga. Meditation connoted fixing one's mind on a specified object, may be anything. To whatever subject one might apply his mind, it would reveal itself. Meditation should be centralised on Truth and on transcendental values.

A foreigner who took to this step, sat erect and adopted the correct posture but concentrated on helicopters as he was working as an engineer in a factory manufacturing them. He said he got several ideas about their techniques. Hence meditation should not drag one to the mental plane. For this a Mantra like the Gayatri, has been recommended and meditating with its help after knowing its import, would fetch peace within and help one to be in touch with pure Divine consciousness. But meditation required intense practice and observance of rules, as "Shradda" could not be learnt through textbooks.

August 11, 1980

Devotion knows no caste or creed 14.3

The term "devotion" has been amply defined in the spiritual classics like the Bhagavatham and the Narada Bhakti Sutras with illustrations. The Pandava Gita explains it in simple words, saying that God resides in our hearts and He is all auspicious. The only lacuna is that our minds are not mature enough to have His vision. But those who are able to experience His manifestation within will feel highly blissful and enjoy the ecstasy.

Devotion can also be described as the spiritual power that can keep away the trauma, the bad complexes and the evil in us. But devotion should not be conventional or ostentatious

nor should it be stagnant. It is not the mere external exuberance that matters. Many may be found to shed tears out of devotional fervour but the same attitude should be shown in wiping out the distress of others. What then is the test of true devotion. The answer has been provided by Lord Krishna Himself. Devotion knows no caste or class or creed. A true devotee should carry the burden with a smile and there should be a "flow" in his life.

"I am the same to all beings; with Me, there is none disfavoured: but those who worship me with devotion are in Me and I am in them. You must find refuge in Me" the Lord has declared openly. Swami Ranganadananda, in a discourse referred to the Almighty's statement about the need to develop discriminative knowledge and deep devotion, the essence of which is "All beings are in Me". A staunch devotee will be contented and free from exultation or resentment. Three emotions should be overcome to reach God; attachment, fear and anger. A sincere devotee neither rejoices nor grieves, is immune to both good and evil and respects every other creation of God. He will remain silent, unmoved by praise or blame. Bhakti is infinite love of God, and praying ceaselessly within and all devotional exercises should help to "bring God before us in our life". Wherever we are, God will come to us if we display total dedication and He will reciprocate our sentiments.

October 1, 1985

The implication of devotion 14.4

Devotion is not a sentimental drivel. It is an absolute commitment to God, in thoughts, words and deeds. It will then mature into exclusive attachment to the Supreme Being. But devotion should be sandwiched between spiritual wisdom and dispassion or renunciation. It implies a total knowledge

of God's majesty, His perfection (free from any defect). His compassion and His easy accessibility to those who approach Him. The love that is generated towards Him cannot be compared to other types of identical sentiments.

Everyone who resorts to this path of devotion should realise that the Lord possesses unlimited, matchless qualities. There is none superior, much less equal, to Him. He is one whole, undivided but yet distinguishable. He could perform any act with any sense organ. The human law of specificity of senses will not apply to Him. There is no difference between His incarnations and His original form (in which He is when He resides in His abode). Therefore, one should neither distrust the Vedas nor dishonour His devotees. He is full of auspicious attributes. Devotion to God will kill the ego in man, making him realise that he is not independent but that whatever he gets in life are gifts of God.

Sri Raghuvarya Swami of Kudali Math in a discourse highlighted the fact that the propounder of the Dwaita philosophy had found that the triple texts-Upanishads, Brahmasutras and the Gita-were in perfect accord with his nine tenets. They recognised the supremacy of the Lord and the absolute reality of the universe. There was a fundamental difference between the Lord and the soul, the Lord and the world, the soul versus the soul, soul and matter and between matter and matter. All human beings have limited capacity and are not autonomous in the pursuit of their ideals. To attain salvation, Sri Madhwa has detailed the path of devotion, describing it as "Raja Vidya". Sri Madhwa insists that a devotee should approach the Almighty through a preceptor. This was not a formality but a spiritual must. It was the religious guide who steadies his disciple, warns him of the pitfalls and short curves on the path to the kingdom of God.

March 22, 1986

Some Divine commands of conduct 14.5

Saints, whom God specially deputes, assume the chief responsibility to awaken the dormant spiritual power in men so that they can enjoy peace and bliss. The Godmen will make lay persons realise the purpose for which they have taken their birth and guide them to adopt steps to go forward in the path of liberation. Another task entrusted to them is to teach people that the Soul, which resides within the body and the body itself which is perishable, are not identical. The bonds of caste, creed, sex and language relate only to the physical body whereas the Soul (Atma) is free from all these factors. It is with the constant blessings of the Almighty that we continue to live. Every moment, He is protecting us.

Sri Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Ahmedabad) in a discourse on the universal moral and spiritual guidelines preached by Lord Swaminarayan said, even the religious-minded people of modern times have no time to search for the Truth though they possess the spiritual urge. Some of them are not competent to interpret it properly as they have not gone through the moral codes.

The Lord's epistle of precepts refines men's conduct, begets virtues and develops integrity. Some of the commands in the text of the Lord are he who acts thoughtlessly or with a bad intention, invites misery; do not give up the path of righteousness out of greed or selfishness; do not utter words which may hurt others; never keep the company of those, who, under the pretext of devotion and preceptorship, indulge in hypocrisy and immoral activities; do the vocation befitting your station in life; avoid dealing with the wicked, those who deceive and the fraudulent, always see the good in others and not their faults; respect saints and study scriptural texts with reverence; to undo sins committed, by mistake,

adopt expiatory measures as per the scriptural directives. Supplement devotion with righteous conduct and never give up faith in the Lord out of fear of slander by the unscrupulous and the ignorant. Being the "Moral Governor". God rewards or punishes a person according to his pious or wicked deeds.

January 5, 1990

The inescapable hand of destiny 14.6

It is not unusual to come across people who will not hesitate to "curse" the Almighty when they find themselves face-to-face with tragic situations. The immediate target of attack is God as man is confronted with problems. Greater will be the blame if for instance, a child dies, though it may be under natural circumstances. Immediately, the suffering people's reaction will be that the religious rites they had conducted and the worship they had offered and the austerities they had observed were all a waste. But little do they realise that religious exercises are not directly related to the results of a man's actions. Events take place according to the past deeds of a person-his virtue invariably yields its fruits and his wicked ways will fetch him punishment.

If God in His wisdom has brought close the day on which a human being should die, whatever may be the precautions he may take, he shall perish at the fixed hour. When a man is born, the time of his death is also automatically written on his forehead. Personal "Will" is sure to be over-ruled by destiny, the inviolable and most powerful agency. The analogy that is cited of the attitude in this regard is about the person, who having purchased a railway ticket, refusing to get down at the destination but wants to continue the journey.

Destiny's decree shall always operate irrespective of a man's stature. The Ramayana shows this by the way in which the Prince who was to be crowned the next day was by a stroke of misfortune made to wear a garment made of bark. What is more, the Divine Mother, whose glance can make a pauper wealthy overnight, had to follow Him in utter simplicity.

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse also referred to the sentiments expressed by the Divine Mother when Anjaneya who was to lead Her to the Lord to bring about their re-union sought Her permission to punish the demoness guards who had been ill-treating Her while in Ravana's custody. She said that they ought not to be blamed and that Her own fate was responsible for Her suffering. Fate means the order by which the former deeds fructify later.

January 26, 1990

Permanent peace through meditation 14.7

In his quest for happiness, man often chases worldly objects. Though he is placed in a comfortable position, seeing others slightly more prosperous, he thinks: "Why not I also get some more money? If I achieve what I want, I will be glad". Everyone of us has some problem and a few desires. We are not content with what we have. If our desires are not fulfilled, we get frustrated, and this leads to suffering.

Real suffering is due to the separation of a devotee from God or of the individual soul from the Supreme soul. The way to experience God is to train our mind see Him within. At times, we may derive joy on such occasions like the moon arising in its full shape or while the Sun sets. But it will last a short while. To enjoy peace permanently, we have to

train the mind, though it will keep eluding us. Sages found the way out and have left the legacy in the form of meditation, which is but liberation from the clutches of the lower senses and the mind.

By practising meditation, we can focus our thoughts from external objects to the Self within and thus get rid of the trammels of the mind. The tension we may feel will go, when we sit with closed eyes in a silent place and lock the power within, dropping thoughts about our personal gains. Meditation will then gradually result in setting aside a regular time for the specific purpose of discovering the well of wisdom that lies within. When the mind becomes quiet and we experience peace, we will have reached the abode of the Self. The Divine energy within has been awakened.

Swami Madhavananda (Siddha yoga), in a lecture, explained the method of practising meditation. There should be initiation by a spiritual leader who will guide us and teach the technique after prescribing a 'mantra' which has to be chanted. The power or energy is available to everyone and it has only to be tapped. Repetition of the 'mantra' will lead to pure thought. Those who meditate can turn out more work in less time because after intense and constant practice, they would have attained infinite peace. Initiation into a 'mantra' is the spark that ignites the dormant spiritual energy in every human heart. The grace of the Guru will have to be obtained.

November 27, 1992

Devotion is not business proposition 14.8

The dominating theme in all holy books is cultivation of devotion. These books spell out the details of generating it through different methods. At the same time, they also

indicate that devotion is not a business proposition, telling God that we must be given plenty in return. What is necessary in approaching God is that the body, the soul and all that we enjoy are His gifts and hence be used for His service. Devotion is indeed a birthright.

The Bhagavatham says that devotion should be characterised by a constant remembrance of God coupled with deep faith in His dispensation. The outstanding example was that of a child called Prahlada who remained undaunted even when tortured as he had total confidence in God's mercy. Devotion cannot coexist with desire of any kind. As Kapila, God enumerates the qualities of a devotee and the same have been presented in an epitomised form in the Narayaneeyam.

In a discourse, Sri, R. Kothandaraman expatiating on the glory of devotion mentioned the characteristics of a devotee listed in Sivanandalahari. He should be like the seed of the rare tree (Ankola) which when bursting out of the fruit, automatically attaches itself to the root. A devotee should retain God's form in his mind all through. A devotee, like a piece of iron which clings to a magnet, should never get himself separated from God. Even as a woman of chastity attends on her husband, irrespective of his idiosyncracies, whether he praises or scolds, her affection should remain the same. The next example given about the true nature of a devotee is of that of a creeper trying to climb to a nearby pole for support. His anxiety to hold on to God's feet should be like that of the water gushing out of a reservoir when the sluices are opened.

Devotion can be cultivated by listening to the exposition of God's pastimes and His episodes which describe how He rescued those who have taken refuge in Him, by visiting temples and by chanting aloud with Divine-intoxication, discarding

shyness. God makes His presence felt where He is remembered and adored. The unfathomable love shown by the cowherd maiden towards the Divine personality - Krishna - is always cited as the acme of devotion. This made Uddhava, sent to the village to fetch Krishna to the city, feel that he should be born as a shrub in the village where Krishna lived.

December 7, 1992

Meditation will help man find God 14.9

There is a great need for understanding the difference between "meditation" and "worship". Meditation implies concentration on the virtues of the Almighty, while worship (Pooja) signifies "offering". Many say public festivities are always crowded and marked by loud chanting and singing, ringing of bells and beating of drums. At times even a glimpse of the deity is impossible. "Will it not be more fruitful to meditate in a calm and serene atmosphere". some argue.

True offering constitutes constantly remembering that what one possesses and what one may desire to have are both privileges bestowed by God. He alone has the power to give. To think that one is presenting to the Lord what He does not possess is not an act of offering. Can anyone point out even a small article in this universe which does not belong to Him? One who gives most, also receives most.

Man is a social being. For fulfilment of his desires, he should put in collective offering" to God by way of public festivities. Even kings took active part in the religious gatherings without rejecting them as "noisy" affairs. People involve themselves when an offering is made collectively so that the fruits may

be shared by all. On the other hand, if a man performs various rites all alone, the fruits thereof will go only to him.

The mind is fickle and also loses concentration even while perceiving physical objects. Hence an idol or a mantra will serve the purpose of prayer. If such aids are discarded, those who wish to meditate may be left with nothing to focus their attention on, said Sri Ganapathi Satchidananda Swami in a message.

In the present era (Kali-yuga), men are being troubled by evil forces and there is no belief in ancient spiritual values. The easy method to get over all problems is to seek God by chanting His names with faith. Saints have prescribed this solution, of using the Divine names and meditating on the glorious forms of God. The human body is a temple and God is seated within. Meditation helps to locate Him. If the mind is kept engaged by chanting mantras, bad thoughts cannot enter and even those which had stealthily crept in, will be thrown out. "Meditate and offer worship, God will give necessary guidance".

February 20, 1993

Devotion will always lead to Supreme bliss 14.10

Some instances where even ardent devotees suffer, contrary to the belief that God never allows those devoted to Him to grieve, make people wonder why He should indulge in such methods. Why should He give agony to his sincere devotees. Is He a mere task-master? Has He no mercy? If that be His

attitude. why should He be adored as the Ocean of compassion? Why should a person seek refuge in Him if he can remain happy amidst worldly pleasures?

These thoughts may arise in some who wanting to become religious, see men in misery. These doubts have indeed been answered. The main reply is worldly activities will end one day and God has reason to appear to be unconcerned when men defy His commands.

Man, from time immemorial, has been behaving as if he is independent and that he needs no help from anyone. He believes he can achieve what he wants by using the power within him and his wisdom. He tries to overcome hurdles by using his intelligence. Only when he feels there is no way out to solve his problems that he seeks assistance. Since no human being can come to his rescue, he remembers the possibility of seeking the Divine hand.

Only when a man is placed in distress, can he be made aware of the Unseen, unlimited power of God. But why should the devotees be immersed in grief when they think of God at all times and know that He alone can solve their problems. Though the treatment afforded to them appears to be harsh, it helps them to gain greater confidence and acquire greater moral courage. Their entire attention will be on God. They will then experience "supreme bliss". The process is like vaccination which is painful and may also cause fever; but it gives relief ultimately making one immune to the scourge, said Sri N. Lakshminarasimhan in a discourse.

Without properly knowing the significance of simple tests given by God, men complain of the master plans. The episode relating to the removal of clothes of women by Krishna, if properly understood will reveal His purpose in doing so. He was young but He wanted the women to learn a lesson.

He was moved when they meekly surrendered themselves to Him. Such a step will remove the bondage of a human being who accepts His supremacy.

October 19, 1993

Do's and Don'ts to discipline mind 14.11

The outstanding contribution of the Bhagavad Gita, a sermon by God-incarnate Krishna Himself on the battlefield, is the incorporation of ten commandments of Hinduism which if followed diligently will purify a spiritual aspirant's mind. Three distinctive paths - of Duty, Devotion and Knowledge - to reach God's kingdom have been prescribed and their merits explained by the Lord.

Devotion in a broad sense has two meanings -- love of God and spiritual discipline adopted by a seeker to attain the goal of freedom or liberation. There are three levels of exercises which he has to go through -- devotion in the form of acquiring knowledge. Devotion as duty brings mental purity, as meditation fetches one-pointedness and reaches culmination when knowledge is gained. Lord Krishna spells out four types of devotees but of them, He likes best one who has crossed these stages and emerges as a supremely wise man (Jnani).

Meditation can again be divided into five stages. In the first, the seeker goes through the general preparation to achieve success in this field. Meditation cannot be gained in a few minutes. A mind which behaves unruly for nearly 15 hours a day, cannot be easily controlled say, in 15 minutes. In the second stage, he resorts to the preparations

just immediately before meditation. The third stage explains the nature of meditation. This is followed by knowing its benefits. In the last, he realises the obstacles in its course. If the mind is to be made conducive to meditation, ten disciplines have been laid down, five positive and the remaining negative, classified as Do's and Don'ts, which can be called the ten commandments.

Swami Paramarthananda, in a lecture, said these guidelines would lead to a smooth condition which could be used in any direction. The five negative aspects refer to the avoidance of hurting others through thought, word and deed. One should never speak disparagingly about other men. Second is the avoidance of uttering falsehood. Every lie spoken connoted as disturbance in the mind and only a harmonised and disciplined mind can meditate. Thirdly, no one should possess anything which does not legitimately belong to him. The fourth emphasises sexual restraint. Lastly, he should not possess anything too much. The five musts are: entertaining only positive thoughts; contentment, a person learning to be satisfied with what he has; practising austerities, the mind maintaining equanimity during opposite experiences; reading the scriptures because the statements have spiritual potency and the last, the act of surrendering to God. The ten directives are equally grouped as Yama (abstention from doing) and Niyama (practices which ought to be upheld).

April 2, 1994

Total faith needed in upholding codes 14.12

Hinduism expects that the directives contained in the fundamental authority - the Vedic revelations, should be accepted

and upheld by one and all, because being Divine utterances, they apply under all situations and for every one, without being questioned because man has neither the qualification nor the right to do so.

The Hindu religion believes in the validity of these statements and people have faith in them. Proper elucidations for the pithy aphorisms have been made by sages wherever necessary. One of the doubts raised by some relate to the need for ceremony to be conducted for departed souls who have left the world years ago and as how the offerings through the medium of fire will reach them whose subsequent births may not be traced. The mantras have the power to transmit the oblations to the concerned. Hence those who lack belief can, instead of asking 'why' these rites are performed, should seek as 'How' they are done. Traditions should be respected and spiritual values honoured. The Ramayana teaches us these aspects while referring to the outstanding merits of Rama who was zealous in the observance of proprieties. He proved the uniqueness of the lofty ideals.

While God-incarnate Rama was being compelled to return from His exile and take over the reins of administrations, one of the sages, in his anxiety to prevail upon Him, expressed some views which resembled those of atheists. Rama's reply was contained in a carping attack: "I wonder how the emperor (Dasaratha) tolerated an unbeliever like you in his court". He said the sage's suggestions were opportunistic and that one who acted contradictory to established code of ethics could be unworthy. The examples set by Rama to lead a life of a perfect man are capable of being followed by us even today if there is a will. They can be copied to the extent possible, said Sri Chinna Sriman Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami in a discourse on Rama's qualities.

Another glorious trait displayed by the Lord was the tenacity with which He stood by the promise He had held

out. Invariably, circumstances may arise when one may be tempted to give it up. But Rama was unwavering in carrying out His commitments. All that one has to do is to declare his helplessness once and seek His protection and God will unconditionally extend His refuge. Rama assured the sages in the forest that He would safeguard their interests. When Sita gently reminded Him that this promise could have been avoided, Rama replied that if need be, He might even give Her up (and Lakshmana too) but not His resolve to protect the innocent sages, "To honour His pledge is indeed a weakness in Him," said Sita later to Ravana while asking him to seek at least His friendship if not offer surrender.

July 11, 1994

Devotion leads to a life of purity 14.13

The methods to develop devotion which have been made available to mankind by sages and saints are many, such as visiting temples, offering of worship, meditation, chanting names and reposing confidence in the words of spiritual leaders, honouring them and abiding by their advice. A devotee is given the option to choose any one among them and hold on to it tenaciously. The main purpose of adhering to these paths is to ensure that a person spends a life of purity realising the value of righteous conduct.

It is in the context of preserving the Moral Law, spiritual values and religious prescriptions that India had been a torch-bearer. The way of life based on values shown by "Bharath" was followed by other countries and they enjoyed prosperity. India's hoary traditions originally formulated by sages and carefully nurtured by saints, had enabled India to establish its superiority in the cultural and spiritual realms. Sanskrit language can even now be found in use in some foreign countries

(words like Garuda and Kubera), revealing how its glory had spread. The wealth of knowledge which the ancient texts contained were utilised by some nations to their advantage by adopting the technical and other excellences contained therein for the development of science and technology.

Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, Kanchi Sankaracharya in a discourse said, like Sanskrit language, the philosophy of Adi Sankara has also come to be praised all over the world. Sanskrit served as a treasure-house of knowledge. There were universities, libraries, and institutions for research in theology and scholars who had doubts or who needed clarifications visited these centres of learning. Emperor Bhoja was known for his interest in promoting scholarship and disseminating knowledge. India has provided the base on which great traditions were built. The hoary culture and rich heritage of India should hence be zealously preserved. People should follow the path of righteousness in their lives. God is bound to extend His blessings to those who cherish ancient spiritual values.

February 8, 1995

Devotion invokes God's grace 14.14

There will be occasions when even ardent devotees who offer their sincere prayers at the feet of God feel disheartened that their pleas have not been entertained by Him. What should be remembered in such cases is that the prayers should be backed by greater intensity. The deficiency lies in the devotees and not with the Almighty.

But worship itself is intended to get rid of desires. When God is approached with deep devotion, there will be no scope

for desires to spring within but the devotees must enjoy bliss. The mind needs to be tuned towards the Supreme Being. While conducting worship, the entire thought must be on God and His qualities. There is no need to display one's opulence nor such a worship offered to earn fame. God did not visit Duryodhana's palace though he had made elaborate and extravagant arrangements to welcome Him but went to the cottage of Vidhura as his heart brimmed with absolute devotion.

Appayya Dikshitar, the savant says in a hymn that a devotee need not take extraordinary trouble to organise his daily worship. Just a Bilva or a Basil leaf will please the Lord. It is wrong when someone states that desires do not get away in spite of his prayers or that they have not been fulfilled. The example of a couple who were totally dedicated to the Lord proves that His mercy has no bounds and that the delay in receiving His response is due to the need for further concentration while praying. The man felt that they have not been blessed with a child despite the sincere demonstration of their faith. But the wife said that God should not be criticised and that the blame should squarely fall on themselves only and that their prayers should be further strengthened. They earned the grace of the Divine and their child became the torch bearer of Hinduism, viz. Adi Sankara.

Sri Bharathi Thirtha Swami of Sringeri in a discourse said, the life of Adi Sankaracharya reveals that even when a devotee chooses the path of knowledge, devotion can co-exist. That was why Sankara composed several hymns. The Lord in His Gita explains how four types of people approach Him. They are: the distressed, the seeker of knowledge, the one who needs wealth and the wise. Of them, the wise ever steadfast and devoted to the Lord, excels. "Excessively dear am I to the wise and he is dear to Me." Not that others are not noble but this man strives to reach God with firm

faith. Sage Suka was an ascetic who excelled his father Vyasa. He recited the Bhagavatham thereby showing that the wise (Jnani) can extol the Almighty through hymns.

May 17, 1995

Meditation is a mysterious ladder 14.15

There are certain basic questions which everyone muses over at some stage in his/her life. What is the purpose of my birth? Why do some people have an easier time than other? Where did I come from and what is my destination? People often struggle to find the answers and those who do so, derive contentment. For this, one should dive deep 'within'.

Yielding to worldly distractions, people seldom try to notice what goes on 'inside'. If they contemplate they will see that the mind is being constantly bombarded by sense perceptions. Very often, it is not until a person reaches a point of great distress that he realises it is time to take stock of his life. It is in this context that meditation comes in. It is a practice by which there is constant observation of the mind. It is a mysterious ladder which leads from earth to heaven, from falsehood to truth, from darkness to light, from pain to bliss from restlessness to abiding peace, from ignorance to knowledge and from mortality to eternity (according to Swami Sivananda). It helps to discover that the infinite well of wisdom that lies inside men.

However, the mind is an elusive animal difficult to be tamed. Meditation creates positive channels in the mind and eradicates destructive influences. It is a scientific process but, the goal is spiritual. Through it, the play of the mind can be seen, Good and evil, friend and enemy are all in the

mind only. Every man can create a world of virtue or vice, pleasure or pain, out of his imagination. There is a power or an energy in each person and this can be tapped. Meditation unleashes this immense potential in each individual.

A virtuous life prepares the mind as a fit instrument of concentration and meditation. Without the aid of meditation, one cannot liberate oneself from the trammels of the mind and attain immortality. During this experiment (of meditation), worldly thoughts are shut out and the mind is filled with the Divine presence. It is no doubt a trying discipline but intense training will bring success.

Swami Vimalananda, in a lecture, said that, in this spiritual exercise, thoughts should be fixed on God and the mind gradually withdrawn from worldly objects. One can get the meditative mood easily if the practice is systematic during the same hours daily. But no violent effort should be made to control the mind; it should be allowed a little freedom for a while; Divine thoughts should flow gently. After some time, one who takes to this path will realise that it acts as a tonic opening the avenues of intuitional knowledge and helps develop a strong will power -- while an inner voice will guide him.

August 9, 1995

Devotion is total dedication to God 14.16

By long usage in religious literature, devotion is commonly understood as adoring God with supreme love and as the way of life conducive to it. "It is the whole-hearted dedication at God's feet. Developing it, a man feels he has gained the highest attainment in life; he rises above fear and finds himself in unalloyed bliss. He becomes indifferent to everything except

God and depends on nothing except Him. It is characterised by absorption in His worship and in remembering His excellences. It's most conspicuous sign is complete surrender to Him and the feeling of intense anguish whenever the mind slips away from Him''. This is how one of the two authorities on Bhakti, Narada describes it. The other expert, Sandilya, defines it as the highest form and ever continuing attachment to God.

The Bhagavatam more or less on these lines, speaks about devotion as follows: "When all the energies of the mind including those of the organs of knowledge and of action, become concentrated as a unified mental mode, directed to the supreme Being, spontaneous like an instinct and devoid of any extraneous motives, the resulting state is known as Bhakti. Like fire, it burns up the soul's sheath of ignorance."

The Bhagavatam is concerned with the depiction of the majesty and greatness of God, who is Supreme, the Absolute, Infinite but is responsive to worship and prayers and that He could be communed with as one's master, father, mother friend or any other relationship one prefers. His majesty is six-fold, omnipotence, virtue, glory, beauty, omniscience and non-affectedness.

In a discourse, Swami B. P. Yati Maharaj said, although human beings are gifted with the faculty of discrimination and thinking, yet very few try to attain immortality. The Bhagavatam points out that among ten million men who perform Vedic rituals, rarely one may be found to really possess intuitive wisdom and thereby labour for liberation. Again, it is the rarest one who displays devotion to Krishna because such a soul does not hanker after even salvation.

Such rare devotion can be cultivated only by constant association with sincere and pious devotees of the Lord. Saints have explained how a pure devotee should conduct himself.

He should avoid avarice, hatred, malice and should not hanker after fame but recite God's names. He should follow the path of genuine asceticism and should not resort to forbidden spiritual exercises. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu has sung that a person who is humbler than a blade of grass, more forbearing than a tree, who honours others, will know the value of Lord's names.

August 25, 1995

Devotion is not mere emotional rapture 14.17

In affirming the value of life, God's sermon on the battlefield, the Bhagavad Gita paves the way for men to return to His fold. The message presents a comprehensive ideal of religion. The different paths made available to men to reach the goal of salvation at times bewilder them as each one has been described by religious texts and leaders as equally important and valid. The path of action enables them to get rid of the impurities in the mind. The path of spiritual knowledge reveals the relationship with God. Both result in developing devotion leading them to the Almighty's abode. It is the key to the vision of God.

What binds us to the world is not our acts but our selfish desires. We should give up the ego and not the activity; there should be self-renunciation. The path of duty asks us to dedicate all our acts in loving devotion to the Lord. Motiveless activity is psychologically impossible but the Gita attitude is that we have an obligation to act but place the fruits obtained at His feet. By acquiring true knowledge of the "Self and of Godhead, persons are purified and their passions are checked and they will realise the need to take shelter in Him.

Duty and transcendental knowledge help men to intensify their devotion, which is nothing but showing love to God. It is a feeling that does not indicate mere emotional rapture. No doubt we should offer worship, pray, meditate, visit temples and take other measures to seek Divine grace but more vital behind these is the affection we show to God and the firm belief in Divine dispensation.

In a discourse, Sri Sugunendra Thirtha Swami referred to the absolute need for a devotee to cultivate this faith in the Lord as it is the very foundation of Bhakti. A person who yearns to approach God should be aware that he cannot achieve anything without the Lord's approval. A disciple asked his preceptor whether God will grant rain to a parched area which was in dire need of water. The teacher promised to appeal to God and told the student to be ready to receive a downpour next day. When rainfall did not occur,the disciple wondered whether it is proper to claim, 'God will give anything'. The master replied that if he had real faith, he should have come prepared with an umbrella to secure protection from the expected downpour but his intention was only to test the words of his mentor.

On the other hand, a physician gave a prescription on a piece of paper to a sick man, who not realising that he has to purchase the medicine, tore it into four parts, took each piece a day and got cured. Such an attitude and total belief that God will stand by him should be the hallmark of a sincere devotee.

October 14, 1995

Faith in Cosmic power, only remedy 14.18

In this scientific age, man is striving to fathom the mysteries of the universe. Yet the infinite power of the "Self" remains

unknown. Man is ignorant of the truth that this "power" is within himself. The Supreme Truth can only be known through faith and meditation. At a time when the good and pious are disappearing from the face of the world, when life has become a battle-field and when ego and selfishness have turned human relationship into a business-like endeovour, it is the imperative need, now, to discover one's own essential nature and the capacity of the indwelling power. The chain of limitations which binds us should be broken to know one another and to understand the pain and suffering of others by putting ourselves in their place. Then we may discover how God enters our lives.

Some may deny the existence of God. But human intellect cannot disprove God. If the intellect can contain Him within its grasp, then it will only mean that intellect is greater than God. A God under the control of intellect is not what we need. What we want is faith in the supreme power which controls the universe and which is beyond the mind and the senses and which makes the intellect function. What we have to enquire about is the very source of that power that exists within ourselves. Faith in Cosmic power, together with meditation, alone will enable us to attain knowledge of the "Self". That power is the very substratum of our existence.

Mata Amritanandamayi, in a lecture, said God moves through His creations. People should shed their selfishness, fully becoming conscious that the effects of good and evil acting in one part of the world will be reflected in other areas. In order to build a healthy and wholesome society, children should be taught moral and spiritual values. The life force that pulsates in trees, plants and animals is the same as that in human beings. The same consciousness flows in every human being, lends its power to the movement of the wind, the flow of the river and the light that filters from the sun. Just like the human body, the world is a whole but the progress we witness is divided growth.

The division in the minds of individuals can be the cause of fissiparious tendencies in the family, in society, in the nation and the world. We should grow spiritually along with our material progress. When we meditate and pray, as a group, the life energy of all of us will harmoniously flow into a single point. Attuning our hearts with that one supreme power, we should submit ourselves to God appealing to Him to let all beings in the world be happy, peaceful and prosperous.

November 27, 1995

Holy company ensures steadfast devotion 14.19

Differences among people due to circumstances of learning, status of birth and wealth exist only in the material world and these disparities do not have any meaning in the spiritual realm. What ultimately matters in life is devotion to God because it holds the key to salvation.

Eternal service to the Supreme One is the end to be attained, according to the Srivaishnavism and no differences exist in the state of Moksha. Even if the service one performs to the Lord differs, every little act carried out with dedication to the Lord is dear to Him. When the sons conduct duties according to their capabilities, the father is happy with all of them and does not show any distinction. Likewise even a menial service rendered to God has spiritual potency.

Guha was neither well versed in the scriptures nor cultured, but he earned Rama's friendship by his service to Him. Likewise,

Vibhishana's surrender to the Lord was accepted by Him though he came from the enemy's camp because he sought the Lord with feeling of true surrender.

In his discourse Sri V. Srivatsankachariar said, Vedanta Desika in his work Paduka Sahasram prays to be Lord that he should always be blessed with true devotion and enthusiasm in the performance of Divine service. This point is emphasised because devotion to God must not waver and a steadfast mind is necessary to remain devoted to Him. We often see in the world people going on pilgrimage to important Theerthas (like the Prayag) with faith that a dip in the waters would wash away their sins, but some living there not bothered to take advantage of the sanctity of the holy waters.

Once the turning point comes in one's life understanding with conviction the futility of material existence, there should not be any effort spared to take the necessary steps to progress spiritually. Desika stresses the importance of satsangh (the company of the holy) to help one remain devoted to God resolutely. The Gita advocates moderation in sleep and food for a true makes on sluggish and deviate from the ideal one has set for oneself.

Even a moment spent in pursuit which takes one away from God must be considered as wasted according to Vishnu Purana. While explaining how a devotee should feel when he spends time in idle pursuit, scripture say that one should feel as bad and desperate as a rich man who has been robbed of his entire wealth. Hence, it is advisable to always remain in the company of other devotees. Wherever devotees seek each other's company and sing the glory of the Lord, He chooses to remain there.

January 1, 1996

Sincerity of devotion alone matters 14.20

There can be none in this world who will get tired of seeing again and again the ocean and its rising and ebbing tides. So too is the joy that can be experienced by witnessing the consecrated idols enshrined in temples. No devotee will remain contented even after worshipping them for hours, because for them, God resides in them and reveals Himself. Every time one goes to worship the idols, one can witness His form from a new angle and dimension. It is not necessary, as some think, that they should be present all the time when the idols are bathed, decorated and adored through the chanting of Mantras and the performance of rituals.

Even a few minutes of worship conducted by a devotee at home will provide joy and peace. An aspirant need not feel that he has wasted his time and thereby get disheartened. Saints and spiritual leaders conduct worship elaborately. That they consider it as their duty, but a devotee who has to discharge his official duties and domestic chores can devote the time available to the worship. It is like tasting just a drop of elixir from a spoonful. The benefits accrued is the some when one gets a lot of its quantity or only a tiny portion. What is necessary and expected is the sincerity of devotion. Everyone should perform worship to the best of his ability.

In this connection, the Jeeyar Swami of Ahobila Math in a discourse described how Sage Narada who was closely associated with God thought that no one equalled him in devotion. The Lord however pointed out to a farmer (in the world) who amidst several challenges like providing for his huge family without much of income and troubles like the monsoon playing truant when his crops were raised, commenced his daily agricultural operations after seeking just for a minutes, God's grace for success in his activities.

The Lord then asked Narada to keep a tiny vessel brimming with oil on his head and go around without spilling even a drop. The sage did so but his entire attention was on the oil and not on God whereas in the case of the farmer, his dedication was towards Him only. Likewise, a student with all facilities, getting a rank is not surprising as compared to his classmate who hails from poor circumstances, lacking comforts and other amenities.

By his devotion, the Bhagavatham says, Parikshit, who was cursed to die within a week, reached God's feet and so too another (Khatvanga) who had just 48 minutes left for shedding his mortal coil reaching God's kingdom through his sincere prayer. No one need regret for having failed to do the mandatory religious duties as prescribed in a detailed manner but he should display his depth of devotion before God and carry them out as best as he can.

April 19, 1997

Recitation of Lord's name 15.1

An effective "passport" for attaining salvation is the constant recitation of the names of the Lord and chanting His glory. No restriction of any kind is imposed on this method of liberation (Bhagawan Nama Sankirtanam).

Tirukkudanthai Srimad Andavan in his discourse pointed out that even Brahma and Indra were not exempted from being bound by the shackles of Maya. Brahma was taught a lesson for hiding the cowherd boys and cattle in a cave, by the Lord Himself taking as many forms as the missing lot and continuing to assume the same for one year. Indra went to the extent of showing his wrath against Sri Krishna for not getting his due puja from the people, without knowing that it was also God's act. In spite of ample proof of His greatness, people still get shrouded in Maya.

Sri Krishna took his friends to the banks of the Yamuna and enjoyed eating in their company. It is something astounding that when attempts are being made of offer Him the Havis by performing Yagnas (sacrifices), the Lord takes the form of an ordinary human being and mixes freely with humble folk. Periyazhwar revels in expounding Krishnavatara and the many facets of the Lord's playful manifestations. One of them shows that people of higher status make themselves easily accessible, without being tied by any inhibition, to those in the lower rungs and intermingle with them freely, to a particular extent. Sri Rama a strict disciplinarian, partakes of eatables with Sabari.

The great saint (Periyazhwar) in one of his works had mentioned the path leading to Moksha. Just as people work hard in the field for eight months in a year and take rest during the remaining months (the monsoon) and as one toils during his youth to lead a comfortable life in the declining

period, so too, people who desire to reach the Lord's feet, should ceaselessly think of Him during the present life. The Lord who directs Periyazhwar to explain to a congregation of scholars that Paramatma is synonymous with Narayana, later doubts whether the saint had become possessed with ego. It is Panchajanya (Sankham) who tells the Lord that the saint sang Pallandu (Mangalasasana) out of sheer love (Preethi) towards the Lord and not out of arrogance.

There should always be an Acharya to detail the glory of God. All that Sri Krishna told Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita was of no avail and in the end, the Lord asks him to surrender to God. If the Lord takes up teaching lessons directly, He has perforce to deal with His own greatness. On the other hand, an Acharya will be in an advantageous position, as a third person, to extol His manifestations effectively. Thus, even centuries after the exit of great savants, their teachings still remain with us.

June 22, 1964

Mirage of life 15.2

One who realises that life is ephemeral will be able to achieve mental poise. For this he should cultivate detachment towards transient objects and seek the association of men endowed with noble and Divine qualities.

Swami Purushothama Tirtha in his discourses on Bhaja Govindam (containing 31 verses written by Adi Sankara bringing out the essence of Vedanta), said, pleasures we presume to enjoy are but fleeting and mirage-like. To overcome Maya (delusion), we should understand, the "Self" and Brahmam.

It calls for a determined effort and the training of the mind to concentrate on God.

The bonds of attachment can be broken by seeking the company of the Sadhus, who can distinguish between Real and Unreal and who will show us the royal road to Godhead. They will help us to wipe out the ill-effects of illusion and enable us to see the light continuously burning within us but not visible because of ignorance. Once darkness is dispelled, we will be able to become introverts when good or bad, pleasure or pain, elation or depression will have no effect on us. The lecturer quoted from the Bhagavad Gita to show the need to discard desire, which breeds anger and ultimately leads us into conflicts and imbalance. We can attain a stage of mental equilibrium even while remaining amidst the worldly turmoil by developing the virtue of contentment, by controlling the Senses and by not giving room to desire and by realising that the so-called happiness is after all a myth. The two essential qualities required for this purpose are discrimination and detachment. An ageing man loses the capacity to enjoy pleasures. Men without wealth will not be cared for by their own kith and kin. When external influences cease to have any impact on us, we can break ourselves away from the shackles of Samsara.

March 12, 1965

Devotion as described in Sivananda Lahari 15.3

Vacillation is repugnant to the concept of Bhakti. The mind of a true devotee will not relent from its concentration on God's feet under pressure of adverse circumstance or extraneous influences. But to discipline the inherently fickle mind to cent per cent perfection is an arduous task. Sri

Appayya Dikshitar compares the mind to a monkey, which will not rest quiet even for a moment. Pleading his inability to control and train the mind not to swerve from thoughts about God, he prays to the all-powerful Lord Nataraja to take the initiative Himself and take his heart as His permanent abode.

Sri Thiruvaiyaru Annaswami Srowthigal, in a discourse said Adi Sankara, in his "Sivananda Lahari" had described the true nature of devotion by means of five examples,which represented different stages of Bhakti-the Ankola tree and its seeds (it is said the seeds that fall to the ground again stick to the tree); magnet and iron; husband and wife; creeper and prop; river and sea. The devotee's love for God would be above the limitation of space, his heart pining for union. He would not tolerate any obstruction to his service to the Lord. In the end, by His grace, God would take the devotee to His fold and, even as river-water becomes inseparable from sea-water, the two become one. The tongue that does not speak or sing the Lord's names and glory, the ears that do not listen to songs Divine, the hands that do not make offerings or perform puja to Him, the legs which do not tread the temple corridors and the eyes that do not enjoy the beauty of His form to the heart's content -- all forfeit the very purpose of their existence. To Sri Adi Sankara, the Almighty is Sri Parameswara, by worshipping whom a Jiva could attain liberation from the vicious cycle of birth and death.

June 24, 1966

Efficacy of Sri Narayana Kavacham 15.4

Mantras-special chants in which are embedded the secrets of God's real form-are an effective medium of worship. Recited with sincerity and devotion, they help us to achieve perfect

communion with the Creator. They are also potent antidotes to nullify the evil influences and deadly effects of black magic and other occult faculties. Mantras enable us to develop supernatural powers, confer on us mental quietude and give us the strength to withstand the impact of inimical forces.

In his discourse, Sri Karpangadu Venkatachariar said when the demons gained enormous might by learning special mantras through their religious head Sukracharya, Indra and the other Devas sought the assistance of a scholar Viswarupa, and mastered equally forceful chants and got back the status which they had earlier lost. The "Narayana Kavacham", which the purohit taught them contain three specific mantras in praise of God. Also termed the "Vaishnavi Vidya", it was an armour providing eternal protection against attack from any quarter. Its repetition redeemed one from all ills and sins.

The detailed account of the efficacy of the Narayana Kavacham also gave a description of the minimum rites one was expected to perform daily, as well as gist of the ten incarnations of God. Recitation of the verses which contained the Avataras would keep off all malefic forces. For instance, meditation on Sri Narasimha would help one to face any danger and on Sri Rama, (while on tour) would enable one to get general protection.

December 16, 1966

A simple recipe to realise God 15.5

Even centuries ago, sages could foresee the trend of wordly events and could anticipate the attitude of people towards religion. Aware that they may not be inclined to go through the strict spiritual austerities and yet in a bid to help them, they had prescribed a simple recipe to realise

God, namely, incessantly reciting God's names. This formula will cleanse the mind of impurities and enable God to reside within one's heart.

The names bear significance but even as a patient will not attempt to analyse the constituents of the medicine that he is advised to swallow, there is no need to find out what they connote. Uttered with devotion, the very names of God will fetch Bliss. The efficacy of this measure has been shown through Draupadi's appeal to "Govinda". The Bhagavatham is specially intended to highlight the beneficial result of chanting God's "Nama".

Sri. S. Jayarama Sarma in his discourse narrated the manner in which a scholar-turned-renegade. Ajamila, was saved from death's clutches though he casually called his affectionate son named after God. Again, the child Dhruva could see God by virtue of his penance repeating God's name.

In recent times, emperor Shivaji in hiding, stealthily joined Thukkaram's congregational prayers. Getting scent of this his enemies lay in wait outside but God, assuming the form of Shivaji lured them away. The emperor could escape, thanks to his chanting the names of "Panduranga" and "Vittala". Likewise, a sentry in an ammunition factory, unable to control his desire to join a bhajan by devotees, left his post late in the night. He later confessed about his dereliction of duty before his officer, who was surprised at the statement because he had made an inspection and found him alert. It was obvious that God had saved His devotee by taking his place.

April 2, 1980

The panacea for all ills 15.6

A common question asked by many is whether devotion and prayers, which are prescribed as the panacea for our

ills, can remove hunger. Saints have replied in the affirmative that singing the praise of God will certainly fetch prosperity here, in this life itself and in the life after liberation. One of Peyazhwar's hymns brings out this point. Worldly requirements and spiritual needs will be met by invoking Divine mercy.

The Law of Righteousness is amended to suit the different eras, and for the present period, incessant chanting of God's names with deep conviction has been prescribed as the best and easiest method. Penance commended for the earlier Threthayuga is hazardous, and one doing it should have Vedic knowledge and enormous wealth. Also the Mantras are to be uttered with clarity and if there is a flaw in the procedure governing the conduct of the rites, it will recoil on the performers.

In a discourse the Jeeyar of Vanamamalai Math said that after the Threthayuga emphasis was shifted to idol worship. The Bhakti cult spread and temples were endowed with property. There was a time when there used to be pujas six times a day and the offerings made to the deities were distributed to employees and the poor. Times have changed and now most of the temples were bereft of the wherewithal even to arrange the minimal rites. It is in this context that devotees are being impressed with the efficacy of chanting and prayers. Even here, all will not be able to master works like the Divya Prabhandam. But out of Divine mercy, Andal has gifted to humanity, a garland of verses called Thiruppavai which anyone can easily sing, they being simple. The third psalm in Thiruppavai invokes the blessings of Trivikrama, indicating that man's wealth will multiply. Food is essential for a man to sustain himself while milk is necessary for nourishment. Both will be bounteous, the verse states.

May 12, 1982

Chanting God's names will save the soul 15.7

The simplest, easiest and most effective remedy, advocated by saints and prescribed in the scriptures, to ensure that all the consequences of the mistakes and sins that we commit may be unintentionally and unknowingly - can be effaced, in the present age, where want of time is a major factor in resorting to the religious exercises is to chant the names of God.

Holy texts cite examples of how men despite misdeeds had escaped punishment by remembering God and uttering His names just once, at the time when they are about to die. It may not be possible for everyone to go through the rigid formula of observing severe austerities, conducting penance or undertaking deep study of texts or even visiting temples. To them, the advice is to utter God's name with faith and all his faults will be condoned.

This should not immediately make a happy-go-lucky person conclude that he can "enjoy" and lead a life of licentiousness and then seek to atone for all his sins by adopting this method. Whatever is easy need not be cheap. There is no guarantee that when he is in the throes of death, his mental faculties will be alert and he can call the Almighty. On the other hand, that is the crucial time when he may even be able to think or see, but may not be able to say one word. To recite God's name should hence arise out of one's constant practice in earlier days and one should have taken to the path of devotion.

God's names are not mere empty words, but contain the potency to clear all the dirt within. They are compared to the tiny match sticks capable of incinerating a huge pile

of rubbish kept accumulated. Also, in chanting, the names, should not be tested for their validity. No one will be foolish to analyse chemically the medicine that is purchased on the doctors advice, to find out their ingredients. What the physician prescribes is taken with the hope that it will cure us.

The manner in which Draupadi was saved by her stirring appeal to "Govinda" is an example often cited to refer to the significance of chanting God's name. Likewise, Bhagavatham mentions the Ajamila episode to prove how God is merciful even to the worst sinner. In his discourse, Sri S.Jayarama Sarma said this pious man, who by a quirk of fate, fell a victim to lust, when about to breathe his last, called his last child, named after the Lord, and even this act brought him a lease of life.

February 12, 1985

Peace within, through renunciation 15.8

Where a man is compelled to walk on a road full of thorns, he uses a footwear. Likewise when he is made to experience the trammels of the world, he can surmount any obstacle using God's names as a protective armour. Chanting is an easy process and the names exert a powerful influence on man and condition his mind. Peace within can be enjoyed through renunciation and purity. No one is asked to discard family ties and run away from homes seeking solitude. On the other hand, he should discharge his family obligations but while doing so, he should always remember God and dedicate the fruits of his action at His feet. He should remain detached. He can cultivate devotion by the recitation of Divine attributes which serve to flush out the impurities in his mind. Even as the jack fruit is obtained only by peeling the outer skin by smearing oil on the palms, gradual detachment is

possible by continuously chanting God's names. Man should avoid greed and treat lust and lucre with contempt.

These are some of the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, who was born 150 years ago and lived for nearly five decades. The Ramakrishna monastic order was established a century ago. He was one of the God-men. In preaching the gospel of God, Swami Ramakrishna asked men to entrust the burden of life at God's feet even as a traveller in a train keeps his luggage on the upper rack. He does not carry it on his head while the train is in motion.

In a lecture Sri. N. Giridhari Prasad said the saint went through a process of self-introspection, practised spiritual discipline and then started sermonising. He based his teachings on Vedic tenets. According to the saint, the world may be likened to water and the mind to milk; the latter, once mixed with the former, cannot be brought back to its original form. Its purity can be kept only in another state, that is if it is turned into butter and then placed in water, "Let the milk of your mind be churned into the Butter of Divine Love by means of religious practices done in solitude.

January 10, 1987

Chanting the Nama brings peace 15.9

Caught in the trammels of worldly activities, even a sincere person, who is zealous of maintaining religious traditions, may find it difficult to perform the various spiritual exercises and observe the austerities. There is no need to feel depressed because Scriptures have provided an easy method of invoking divine bliss. It is to chant God's numerous

names which spell out His auspicious attributes and boundless compassion towards humanity. The distressed and the enfeebled can get relief from grief and enjoy happiness by this simple process, the only condition being that they should have total faith in its efficacy.

If a person recites the holy names of God even unconsciously, his sins will dissolve like salt in water. The recitation can be done at all times, by all and in all places, with little or no expenses. The test of sincerity is that the body will be thrilled when the names are uttered and tears will stream down the eyes, the voice getting choked with emotion. There is spiritual power and potency in each name and it serves to realise the Lord.

The son of the great Saint Kabir once told his father that he cured a sick person, a devotee of God, of a dreadful disease by chanting "Ram, Ram". Instead of getting enthused over his son's achievement, Kabir chided him. People around were amazed and felt that Kabir might have become insane. Kabir told his son that he had not understood the sanctity of the Lord's name and that even by uttering "Ram" just once, the purpose would have been gained. Repeating it might mean reducing the name's greatness. Kabir then asked him to meet Tulsidas and Surdas.

Kamal (the boy) who went to Tulsidas was taken to a colony of leprosy patients where the Saint poured Ganges water into their mouths, uttering"Ram" only once. There was instant relief and all the cured joined in the prayers, in praise of God. When Kamal met Surdas, the latter led him to a corpse and uttered "Ram" once into its ear when the dead man rose, as if from a dream. Swami Vimalananda in a discourse also referred to dacoit Ratnakara becoming Valmiki, by virtue of his "initiation" with the "Rama" Mantra. The glory of God's names cannot

be established through reasoning and intellect. It can be experienced, through devotion and a continuous repetition of the "Nama".

February 5, 1988

Chanting Divine names, easy way to Salvation 15.10

One of the most distinguising traits which every person should try to cultivate is to forget even the greatest help and most merciful deed that he might have done to others. At the same time, he should never forget even the smallest assistance that he has received. These ideals are indeed very difficult to practise, because invariably the tendency is to boast about even an insignificant help done to others. Sri Rama, God-incarnate, displayed the rare quality of magnifying others virtues. If someone had shown Him even an insignificant gesture of goodwill, He would go out of the way to glorify it and even blow it out of proportion.

It should be the aim of every man to do good to others always. Based on this arises the maxim - think no evil, do no evil and never conduct yourself in a way that makes others hate you. To uphold this, the mind should be kept pure. The mind functions like a camera lens, retaining whatever be the object on which it is focussed. Scriptures point out to jealousy and ostentation as the roots of evil. To keep the mind steady, without being pulled in many directions, the mere closing of the eyes or retiring to a secluded spot may not serve the purpose. Our prayers to God and the love we show Him will make Him give us the powers to resist temptations.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba, in a discourse, said that even as a person who has money can purchase what he desires, a devoted person can adopt the easy method of chanting the Divine names and with the spiritual powers so secured, plead with God to show mercy. His names serve as wealth to "purchase" the Almighty. Hinduism is so broadbased that people see God in every creation, the reason why they worship basil (thulasi) plant, specially chosen trees, the cows and the idols. To lead a peaceful and virtuous life, one should never abuse others, as that is bound to recoil.

Another vital message that should be remembered is that our kith and kin can accompany us only up to the grave but God alone is our permanent companion and hence we should place our total faith in Him and seek His constant guidance. The example of Harischandra should remind us of the need to uphold the principles of righteous conduct. The killing by Sri Rama of Thataki indicates the need to subdue wicked propensities in us, of restoring life to Ahalya and seeing to her reunion with her sage, about the necessity to be polite and gentle and the embracing of Sri Sita to His fold, about God's close affinity with His devotees (rajas, tamas and sattva qualities). God's presence can be felt by our deep devotion and service to humanity.

March 27, 1989

The power of Divine names 15.11

It is an admitted fact that no one is infallible. Born as a human being, one cannot avoid committing sins or mistakes or misdeeds - in some cases this may not however be deliberate. But as per Divine dispensation, the act will deserve punishment. Scriptures however say that expiatory measures can be adopted by the erring man whereby he can plead with God and express his regret that he had carried out the prohibited act without

being aware of the, consequences and assure Him that he will not repeat the act, Gods response will be instantaneous.

A question is asked as what will happen if the penitent, after some time repeats, the sinful act. The propitiatory process of reciting the names of God will take care of even such a situation. The chanting makes the generator, from which the misdeeds originate, to stop totally.

The constant repetition of Divine names with faith and confidence of securing the pardon from the Divinity has been proclaimed as a universal remedy for the ills of man. One who suffers from troubles, who feels miserable, who has no strong foothold, who is afraid of this worldly existence, who is afflicted with terrible diseases, who suffers from psychic disorders like imaginary tension and delusion - all can take recourse to this easy method to win God's grace. Age, sex, status, time, method of expression and nature or magnitude of the sinful act will not matter.

One may not even be aware of the way to pronounce it properly or know the meaning, but one will be freed of the sins. God destroys all of them when He is remembered even by men of evil designs, Sri M.R. Nagasubramaniam said in a discourse.

This extremely simple process of seeking Divine intervention does not take cognisance of the intention of the individual. A leper who wished to commit suicide took a sip from a pitcher of nectar left in his hand by a stranger warning him that it contained poison, was cured of his illness. Even as a small match stick can reduce a hayrick to ashes, though the act might have been caused by a child, Divine names can save everyone even if uttered casually.

July 11, 1990

Efficacy of chanting Lord's names 15.12

While reciting the names of God has been prescribed as one of the easy steps to wipe out one's sins, it should be understood that a person cannot get away with the consequences by continuously and deliberately committing misdeeds hoping that the Divine recipe suggested will suffice. God will certainly excuse our mistakes if we adopt any of the means but what is to be understood is that when it is not possible to resort to an act of atonement, he can pray that he has no other way except to seek His pardon. None should repeat the mistakes knowingly and claim immunity by the process of chanting. The repentance should be genuine and to the best of his ability, a person should uphold the rules of good conduct and refrain from doing prohibited acts. There should be no misapprehension that elaborate and extravagant worship will please God. What God expects of a devotee is his sincerity and faith. Otherwise, the procedures adopted will only indicate the worshipper's hypocrisy.

The extraordinary value of the Divine names has been made known in the Bhagavatam in the Ajamila episode. A scholar of repute, he fell a victim to the charms of a woman. As he was about to die, he uttered the name of his last child, which was also that of the Lords'. The reward was in the form of pardon. By retracing his steps and being devoted in the next life, he was liberated. This only reveals that God's names carry immense power.

Pointing out how human beings should express their gratitude to God for the mercy He has shown to them, Sri Vishwesha Thirtha Swami referred to the refusal by some holy men to part with the offerings intended to be given to God through a religious rite, to hungry youngsters sent by Krishna whereas the wives of these saintly men gave the same unhesitatingly to the boys, as they knew that the purpose

of observing the rite would be served when God-incarnate Himself is present in their midst, ready to receive the offerings. The Upanishads say that God is within each one of us and that we should feel His presence at all times. We should return to the Almighty what He has granted to us. On that score, what was earned through unrighteous methods should not be submitted to Him. God will be with us if we entertain pure thoughts in our minds.

To reach God, spiritual knowledge (about His supreme powers and of the Self and its limitations), devotion and detachment are necessary. Vadiraja humourously says that men know how to make money, are devoted towards their families but detached when it relates to God (They shy away from Him). The foster mother of the Divine child Krishna while attempting to tie Him to a stone to prevent His mischief had abundant love but not spiritual knowledge. God will get bound when we equip ourselves with these requirements.

July 23, 1994

Chanting of God's names efficacious 15.13

The goal of human life has been clearly specified in our sacred texts, viz, to attain salvation, and they also indicate the method for achieving it. The prescription pinpoints the need to uphold the Law of righteous conduct which, prescribes that one's thoughts, utterances and actions should be identical and one should eschew anger and other evils. The religious injunctions permit earning wealth to meet the day-to-day needs, but it should be acquired only through legitimate methods. Man is also permitted to enjoy comforts but he should not be avaricious.

To observe these duties, a person need not retire to a secluded spot. He should follow with sincerity, the path shown by sages and seers. What men should learn, what type of knowledge they should acquire, how they should conduct themselves and what constitutes the salient features of the Law of Virtue have been placed before humanity. The Azhwars have propagated their message, in Tamil, which is collectively called Divya Prabhandam or "Dravida Veda".

The Jeeyar Swami of Vanamamalai Math in a discourse, said the Lord in His incarnation as Rama had declared in His own words that He was an ordinary human being, and had demonstrated how everyone could observe the Law of Virtue. The Azhwars have extolled all the incarnations, but Nammazhwar has laid stress in one verse, on the life of Rama because He had shown the way to lead a perfect life. The Ramayana has been adapted by many illustrious personalities like Kamban, Tulsidas and Vedanta Desika (in his Raghuveera Gadyam). Rama never deviated from the path of righteousness.

Though Rama lived long ago, yet humanity worships Him through idols and pictures even today. Should a person find it difficult to visit a temple or perform worship to His image, he has been shown as easy way to receive His grace, through recitation of His name "Rama". When the syllable "Ra" is uttered, bad thoughts within one will be erased, while the other syllable "Ma" will ensure prevention of their re-entry. In North India, Rama is described as "Maryada Purushothama" (the Revered).

The chanting of the name "Narayana" may be slightly long for some and hence the name "Govinda" which has only three letters (in Sanskrit) is easier for recitation. While leaving this world after completing His mission, Lord Krishna said, that He could not re-pay His debt to Draupadi, who at a critical juncture invoked His help by uttering His name

"Govinda". But simpler than this name is the two syllable antidote for all ills, "Rama". Outstanding personalities derived benefit by chanting "Rama" and have transmitted the spiritual power they acquired to humanity for peace and prosperity.

January 26, 1995

Sacred name which purifies our mind 15.14

One of the essential lessons a man of devotion should learn from the study of the Ramayana is to maintain equanimity even amidst the pairs of opposites - joy and sorrow. It is not easy but the life of Rama, God-incarnate, will teach a person how to achieve it.

The Lord, in His manifestation as Krishna also, emphasises this aspect (through the Bhagavad Gita). The spiritual culture of India is reflected in the Ramayana and the Gita and in the other epic, the Mahabharata. The very utterance of the word "Rama" will purify our mind. It also destroys the sin accrued by the use of unpalatable words.

After the original work on Rama's life in Sanskrit by Valmiki, several versions in other languages have been written by other poets and the outstanding contribution in Hindi has been by Tulsidas, a bard of Uttar Pradesh of the 16th century. This inspired apostle has given humanity an intimate perspective of Divinity. Throughout his narration in his Book Divine, called Ramcharitamanasa, Tulsidas reminds us that the purpose of the Lord's incarnation as Rama was to demonstrate how to uphold virtue. Even an enemy (Mareecha) glorifies Him as the embodiment and the very image of Righteousness. The bard's expressions are steeped in overwhelming emotions;

they are soaked in sorrow when Rama is banished and soar into ecstatic joy when it was decided to crown Him as the emperor-successor.

In his lecture, Swami Thejomayananda (Chinmaya Mission) said Tulsidas reveals the identity of Rama as Hari who makes us experience Supreme Bliss by the elimination of sorrows. Our worldly bondage will be snapped and we can easily cross the ocean of mundane existence by holding to His feet. The bard describes the Lord's charm, His wisdom, His compassion and His love for the helpless. He grants liberation even to demons. The immortal poet says that though he (Tulsidas) was dull-witted, the grace of the Lord and his spiritual mentor motivated him to write this poem. He says he composed the poem for his own joy. It reveals the nature of the Divinity and teaches us our duties in this world. "Goswami" Tulsidas offers his obeisance to Lord Siva who represents faith. The prayer describes Siva with Parvati by his side, Ganga on His head, deadly poison held in the throat, the king of snakes upon His chest, and pleads that He should protect him. The Ramayana of Tulsidas is thus an elixir of devotion and a poem sung rapturously.

October 1, 1996

Lord's name the panacea 15.15

The greatest blunder that a man invariably commits is to become over-confident of his own powers and to presume that he can by himself achieve anything, not realising his own limitations and that all his actions are being monitored by a Supreme unseen force. Man's pride usually arises out of three factors - possession of wealth, his pedigree which may he high and his acquisition of knowledge and intellectual attainment. He feels that, his planning being meticulous, he has succeeded in every scheme he has conceived and

executed. The same person will curse God when his attempts fail. Scriptures remind humanity that not a blade of grass grows unless God so decides and approves. "Submit yourself to the Almighty, He will extend all guidance in all your efforts," advise the scriptures.

"Parents are no protectors of a child in this world; a medicine is no remedy for an ailing person and a vessel is no protection to a person drowning in the ocean, in as much they are all seen to fail in numerous cases. Whatever being, high or low, and possessing a distinctive nature produces or transforms an object, and by whomsoever it is prompted to do so, all that is you and nothing other than you" are the prayers of a young child-devotee who totally relied on God when tortured and even administered poison, for his only crime that he recognised no human being as powerful as God and holding that God alone is Supreme who never fails to protect a devotee who has entrusted himself to Him and surrendered at His feet. That was Prahlada who defied his father, who through a penance obtained a boon not to be killed by anyone. His cleverness failed before God who took a special man-lion form to destroy him.

In his Harikatha, Sri R. Aravamudan said the child proved that faith can move mountains and that the chanting of the Lord's name is the panacea for all our ills and can remove all obstacles in life. There should be absolutely no doubt that God, in whom one has placed one's confidence, will save one from perilous situations. A tale is told of two persons (narrated by Sringeri Acharya) facing the problem of crossing a river. One uttered God's name and reached the other shore safely. The other, who also resorted to chanting, doubted, while in midstream, whether the mantra would prove effective and he was washed away.

December 12, 1997

Temple worship 16.1

One of our duties as human beings is to avail ourselves of every opportunity to do good to others. The poor can serve others by their physical labour and the rich by their wealth. Some can use their influence to better the condition of others. That way, we can keep alive in our hearts the sense of social service.

It is the poor that joined together in ancient times and built the grand temples and towers which we find today in every town and village of South India. The economy of those days was different from what it is now. People's wants were few and the surplus produce of the land was utilised to hire labour to build these great structures of public utility and spiritual inspiration.

In the present day, social service is viewed in a different manner. Schools and hospitals are built and banks organised on a community basis with the object of eradicating ignorance, diseases and poverty. But it is evident that these forms of social service have not been an unmixed blessing. Education has not eradicated falsehood and corruption. On the other hand, unsophisticated tribal people, whom modern education has not reached, are found to be more honest than the so-called educated people. Confidence of obtaining cure in hospitals has made people lead reckless lives. All the banks that have come into existence have not succeeded in eradicating poverty among the masses.

In our modern mode of life, we have multiplied our wants. This will lead only to perpetual discontent. A life of extreme simplicity alone can bring contentment and happiness to the people. In this country, there are, what may be called, community temples. For instance at Avadayarkoil, it is the custom to offer large quantities of cooked rice to the presiding deity

and the same made available to all at a nominal cost. In many temples the sense of community life is fostered by devoting special days and occasions for it. Consecrated food is made available through them to all those in need.

Gratitude for help received is a cardinal virtue. The taxes you pay are your expression of gratitude for the services rendered by the agencies concerned. There are super-human agencies; which confer benefits on us. We must express our gratitude to those agencies in the manner prescribed in the Vedas. This expression of gratitude is known as Yagna. Though schools, hospitals and banks and such other social service organisations may be necessary in the context of our present times, these institutions cannot serve their respective purposes in the absence of devotion. The one cure for all human ills is the power to endure them with faith in God's grace. Bhakti alone can give that power of endurance. Temples are the agencies for the cultivation of bhakti. Hence the obligation to build temples in every place.

What is the significance of making offerings to the idols installed in temples? This is done as an expression of gratitude to the Power that created all things. Man by himself cannot create even a blade of grass. We will be guilty of gross ingratitude if we do not offer first to God, what we eat or wear. Only the best and the choicest should be offered to God. It is not every one that can do pooja at home and make these offerings to God. It is here temples come into picture. Offerings are made in the temples on behalf of the entire community.

It is not even necessary that every one should worship inside the temples every day. Gopura Darsanam will itself elevate our minds and make us remember the source from which we derive all the earthly benefits. At the same time, it is necessary for the community to see that worship at

the temples is conducted properly. We should make it a point to see the temple tower every day and thereby concentrate a while on God. At least once a week we should go round the temple, reciting naamaas (God's names) and doing bhajan. If we do so, we will derive real and lasting benefit.

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi

Beneficial and effective results of mantras 16.2

The most enviable and extraordinary gifts which mankind has been endowed with, in contrast to animals and birds, are the privilege to chant Mantras, offer prayers and worship God, and the exercise of an absolute control over dietary habits. Mantras, which are everlasting and efficacious, have a spell-binding effect and a toning impact on the human mind and help achieve mental peace. Manu's Code emphasises the purificatory and propitiatory aspects of the Mantras to cleanse one's hearts. An elaborate account of the rituals connected with the wedding of Sri Rama with Sri Sita is contained in the Ramayana to explain to posterity the need to cherish and practise them . Sri Rama scrupulously went through the formalities prescribed in the Sastras and the entire universe echoed with joy over the union of the Lord and the Divine Mother brought about by Sage Viswamitra.

In his discourse Sri Sengalipuram Anantarama Dikshitar referred to the great import which each syllable of the Mantras uttered during marriages carried with it and pointed out how they were intended to welcome the bride into the

new household and gave directions for her future behaviour. Marriage symbolised a total identification of the thoughts and deeds of the husband and wife and was an unbreakable and irrevocable bond.

Returning to Ayodhya, Sri Rama got trained in administration. He was soft-spoken, compassionate, gentle and considerate towards citizens and shared their joys and sorrows. He honoured scholars and respected the aged. Never did He depart from traditions nor give room for untruth. He won such universal approbation that Dasaratha's decision to step down from the throne and make Him Emperor was heartily applauded.

November 9, 1966

Special import and potency of mantras 16.3

The Vedas are the very breath of God. The Almighty reveals Himself to us through them. "Karma Kanda", a part of them dealing with duties is intended to inculcate spiritual discipline in us. Hence religious rites should be performed with fervour as they will help us in "inner interpretation" and purify the body and the soul. Religion is not mere imagination nor a dogma, but when it is converted into a business it loses its spirit. The Mantras are not mere words but carry a special import and potency. By consistent practice of the various austerities prescribed in religious literature, one will be able, step by step, to reach the summit, The Guru, having crossed the various barriers and known Transcendental Bliss, is in a position to teach the disciple the methods of God-perception and hand him over the bunch of keys to unlock the treasure.

Swami Bhadragiri Kesavadas in his discourse said intense efforts would help one to obtain the power of concentration. If that was not possible, he could perform the deeds with self-control and renounce the fruits of his actions. Even as an ant knows the real taste of honey or sugar, a devotee alone would be able to experience the total happiness of coming into communion with the Supreme Being. To show how by affection one can convert even the hard-hearted, he narrated an incident in a saint's life. After distributing several sugarcane pieces presented to him to members of the public, he brought only one to his house when his uncompromising wife threw it down, breaking it into two. Instead of getting angry, the saint remarked that she had only demonstrated her desire to share it with her spouse.

March 8, 1972

Efficacy of Vedic incantations 16.4

The efficacy of Vedic incantations, recited strictly according to tradition, can be proved scientifically. One of the religious functions for an enceinte woman suggests the rendering of special Mantras by two proficient players on two veenas. The sound waves are found to have a direct bearing on the growth of the child, which will be found exceptionally talented. The Mantras retain their power for all time. From womb to tomb of a person, about 40 religious rites have been prescribed (Samskaras) for the prosperity, happiness and sound health of a human being. Marriage is never treated as a mere biological necessity: on the other hand, it is a sacred contract intended to maintain the continuity of a family. The Mantras recited during the functions are intended to ensure a sound progeny. A political treatise, Sukra Needhi, gives an instance where

a dull person was turned intelligent by making him repeat some of the religious functions, as it was guessed that their performance on earlier occasions while he was young had become infructuous as they had been carried out imperfectly.

In a discourse, Sri S. Panchapakesa Sastrigal referred to the Pumsavana-Seemantham function that had to be organised during the fourth month of a woman's pregnancy, though traditionally it was being conducted at a much later period. The Mantras chanted would result in the proper development of the child without deformities. The basic requirement to test the potency of the Mantras was faith and belief in our Sastras.

June 18, 1976

Efficacy of mantras 16.5

There need be no doubt about the inherent efficacy of the mantras, as they are God's utterances. By acquiring them from a proper source by proper means, by a deep study of their import with dedication, reverence, seriousness and sincerity and by constant meditation, one can definitely achieve the desired results. But the mantras are not intended merely to fetch material benefits.

The mantras provide the moral strength to withstand trials, condition the mind to face any problem and remain pure and unperturbed, and ultimately have communion with God. They should not, therefore, be used indiscriminately. Some, who might have tasted power by utilising them and got personal gains would have also experienced that

the latter were short-lived. Spiritual leaders, who have digested their contents, before initiating others, will take care to test the genuineness of the recipients and ensure that they are fit persons who will cherish the mantras as a method to realise God. But the reward is certain for those who meditate on them. Some years ago, a rogue elephant went on a rampage and when everyone was helpless, Kanchi Sankaracharya went before it weaponless muttering mantras and tamed it by sprinkling on it a few drops of consecrated water. The Mahabharata reveals the potency of mantras by explaining how, after a casual chanting, a child was presented with a babe, whom the former discarded, fearing the consequences.

Sri T. S. Balakrishna Sastrigal, in his discourse said that growing as Kunti, the child later used the mantras to solve her husband's dilemma and begot five sons -- the Pandavas. She survived only to tend the fatherless children. The epic, a gift to mankind by Vyasa, has been expounded by succeeding sages to provide mankind the spiritual knowledge required to lead a life of virtue.

January 19, 1977

Mantras should be learnt in childhood 16.6

The mind of an individual is constantly subject to two powerful influences. On the one hand, he is lured by baser instincts which involve him in committing misdeeds resulting in his treading the path of vice. On the other hand, by Divine grace, he may choose the company of saintly souls and God's representatives whose teachings will enable him to devote his entire attention on God and practise Dharma. These spiritual leaders will prescribe him the simplest recipe to visualise the Almighty-through Mantras and meditation.

By chanting the glorious names of the Supreme Being, the pious individual will be able to overcome lust, anger, malice, avarice, ego and jealousy, the six main evils which corrupt a person. How to conquer them is explained through a parable, citing the fight between a viper and a mongoose. As and when the snake attempted to sting its enemy, the latter rushed to a nearby tree, burrowed a hole at the root, chewed a bit of it and came back. Ultimately, the reptile exhausted all its venom when the mongoose, which had developed immunity by taking the drug, overpowered it. Esoterically this dins into us that we can escape the impact of the six strong forces by developing resistance through the chief remedy -- recitation of God's names. This habit, however, should be cultivated from one's formative period for when one becomes old, his failing faculties will refuse to obey his wishes. The Mantras learnt during boyhood will provide the aspirant with the ability to concentrate. The lives of Prahlada and Dhruva, both children, stand as symbols of pure devotion.

Sri V. S. Venkataramana Rao in a discourse said Prahlada the child-devotee, braved all hazards he was subjected to by his father, by chanting the Lord's name in faith.

September 21, 1977

Why worship in temples is necessary 16.7

God permeates the entire universe, but sceptics ask for a proof about His existence. He cannot be seen by us but He witnesses all our acts. An unscrupulous man, relying on his sagacity, may presume that if he commits a misdeed within the four walls no one will know about it. The incident may go unnoticed by human beings, but the Almighty will

be aware of it. A ruler once announced a valuable gift to any one who revealed God's presence to him. While everyone stood baffled, a little girl told him: "I shall offer 12 gifts if you can tell me where He is not present".

Likewise, the grand old poet-evangelist, Avvaiyar, on her pilgrimage, once took rest in a dilapidated temple and stretched her legs towards the deity. Parvathi (in Heaven) was annoyed at her attitude, as She mistook it for defiant attitude. Despite Lord Siva's explanation that it could not be intentional, Parvati appeared before her and asked how she could show disrespect to the Lord. Her reply was: "Please indicate a place where God does not pervade and I shall stretch my legs in that direction".

Sri Kripanandavariar, in a discourse, referred to the usual question of why devotees should congregate in a temple. If God is everywhere, is it not enough for one to sit in his house and offer worship? The temples are abodes of God. The Sun's heat does not burn a cloth but only dries it. By focusing the Sun's rays through lens, the cloth can be set ablaze. At the converging point, the heat is great. Likewise, within the temple, the consecrated idol reveals its powers directly and helps a devotee to meditate.

Nayanmars and Azhwars had sung God's praise in their hymns and had made images talk. The devotional outpourings of great saints are in Sanskrit and Tamil. These are the eyes of our religion. They lay emphasis on charity and people are asked to donate liberally and instantaneously for causes like temple construction. The sacred hymns, like Thevaram, should be kept alive by honouring the experts who recite them, and inviting them to sing on occasions like marriages.

August 29, 1980

The power of mantras is enormous 16.8

A mystical energy encased in a sound structure and containing within its vibrations a certain power is termed the "mantra". Upon concentration and repetition of a prescribed mantra, its energy is elicited and takes form. Each mantra is constructed from a combination of sounds which have a definite and predictable effect on the human psyche and body. An obvious example is the difference between classical and rock music; the former tends to be relaxing while the other is inclined to excite the senses. On a more subtle level, mantras are applied for specified purposes.

There are different types of mantras but more common is the one in which a specific form with attributes is visualised, along with the repetition of the sound. A family man, for instance, whose ideal is to be a loving and responsible husband might meditate on the name Rama. Visualisation of deities is only an aid to focus the mind. Repeating the mantras, which are the names of deities, internalises the power of vibrations contained in them. As Divine power manifests itself in sound, the mantra itself is the subtle body of the deity. By chanting the syllables with accuracy and devotion, the form of the mantra's presiding deity will be invoked.

In a discourse Swami Vishnu Devananda said using sound vibrations (japa) for meditation is a method of channelling one's consciousness from the lowest to the highest level of pure thought. Uttered verbally or mentally, a mantra lifts one into the telepathic stage and beyond to the transcendental. The power of sound is enormous and tremendous. In addition to image and form, it can generate ideas, emotions and experiences. Chanting removes the impurities in the mind. Concentration on the meaning of the mantra and on the attributes of a

particular deity will fetch God-realisation quickly. In the state of meditation, the flow of inner thought-wave is intensified. The deeper the meditation, the greater the effect

March 5, 1987

Daily rituals underline equality 16.9

It may surprise us that socialism in principle and practice in the religious domain was advocated even centuries ago by our seers, through a specific rite (among various others). This spirit of equality was inculcated even while boys grew up. The Vedic injunctions to carry out certain tasks by a group of people were intended for the properity of entire humanity. The individual upholder of these directives may enjoy peace within but the exercises in general were to benefit mankind by invoking timely rain helping crops to prosper.

In the specific religious ceremony, the youngsters, after being taught the mother of the mantras, are to seek alms from the public. The food so collected was to be pooled and then redistributed to the boys. Rich or poor they should partake the same type of food, thus removing the feeling of distinctions, if any.

The scriptures ask every man to observe this basic duty, thrice every day, without fail. Even if circumstances force him to give up other tasks like conducting worship at home, reciting hymns and visiting temples, this rite should not be given up. All the spiritual exercises will be purposeless if one fails to perform this basic offering to God. It is simple and may take little time even when a person is in a hurry.

What benefit will this compulsory duty fetch? Being mandatory, there is no need to specify the outcome but the discipline when observed, the main mantra with its spiritual potency when chanted as prescribed and the submission made to God will result in the person acquiring poise, depending on his endeavour. The best illustration will be a pothole in a road; a cyclist will get hurt by being thrown away; a scooterist may just avoid it in time; a car may not feel the impact at all. If the pothole is likened to grief, non-believers in God will be affected, those who seek God's help only when in distress will be spared, those who respect Divine Law will share it with God while those who totally obey Him will not experience at all. Sri B. Sundar Kumar in a discourse explained how God took an incarnation as the diminutive Vamana, went through the ceremony.

March 31, 1992

Relevance of rites eternal 16.10

Modern youth question the rationale behind the religious rites and sacraments. What is the purpose of the ceremonies, why should they be observed at all and of what relevance are they, many ask. There are certain procedures and exercises prescribed by ancient wisdom after being tested over the years. May be some of them defy proper explanation but certain facts in the scriptures are to be accepted with the belief that they are for our enlightenment and are authoritative and beneficial. Valid elucidation is possible for most of these observances.

Even today, people follow a set pattern while taking lunch or dinner. Why not a change be effected in that order? Did

anyone feel it unnecessary to wear a particular type of dress during convocations? Has anyone thought of altering this practice? Even now, in State functions, dignitaries go in procession in horse-drawn chariots. Cannot these animals be replaced by bullocks?

Regulations insisted by foreign rulers are being blindly followed even now. Why not then the valid statements in the Vedas and our holy books be adopted? The Vedic revelations have sanctity and if the directives therein are upheld, there will be discipline and order in society. The spiritual commands provide us with moral strength to pursue the path of devotion. A student has to complete schooling before seeking entry into the portals of universities. These religious Do's are in the nature of prayers to invoke Divine grace and can never be considered a waste or futile exercise. The mantras when chanted as part of these religious duties, will sharpen people's intellectual acumen, develop the power to grasp quickly and that of retentivity of knowledge acquired, and inculcate a sense of discipline.

The Ahobila Math Jeeyar Swami, in a discourse, said that even as an intending traveller would specify his destination before purchasing a railway ticket from the counter or a person entering a shop is conscious of the monetary limit while purchasing an article, a man should first be aware of the goal of his life. If he decides to reach God's kingdom then he should know about his Self and that this body of his is totally different from the soul. The complexion of various people may vary but their souls are the same.

February 26, 1994

Vidhura Needhi 17.1

Even when one is confronted with the worst trials and tribulations, he should not lose his balance. Patience is a virtue and the quality of endurance (kshama) is the hallmark of nobility. This is evidenced by Dharmaputra's absolute calmness and unperturbed outlook.

Sri Karpangadu Venkatachariar expounding the Mahabharata dealt with the ennobling advice given by Vidhura, a great counsellor and an unparalleled statesman, to the blind king, Dhritharashtra, while explaining the impending consequences arising out of the enmity between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Vidhura Needhi as it may be termed, brought out several valuable doctrines. For instance, Vidhura says that some are always intent on creating rift and conflict, revelling in sowing seeds of dissension or wounding others' sentiments. Friendship with such men should be shunned. Those endowed with wealth should help their kith and kin in want. They should however decide either to refuse to part with their one or render the aid, knowing full well that it will not be returned. There is no point in regretting or lamenting over the loss later.

Dharma Sastras, in which several codes are laid are no doubt difficult to follow,but it will be wrong to discard them because of the hardship involved in putting them into practice. Words of wisdom dinned into the ears of those who refuse to listen and assimilate them, are like precious things lost in the ocean, which are irrecoverable. Dharma Sastras should be taught step by step. Since youth is the period when one is pulled on all sides by temptations, the restrictions on personal conduct are rigid. If there is no control over the Senses (Indriyas), the result will be unmitigated suffering. Lust, of any kind, should be controlled with grim determination through strict self-discipline. Even Devas are no exception

and he instanced Indra's overtures to Ahalya. Vidhura tells the king that Duryodana's acts against the Pandavas were unpardonable. Wealth accumulated by means other than fair, is bad. If the ill-gotten money is to be distributed with an eye on obtaining future benefits, it will be of no avail. The self-possessed, like Dharmaputra, should remain unruffled under all conditions, with his thoughts fixed on God.

June 16, 1964

Guide to virtue 17.2

A shrewd man would scrupulously avoid evil deeds and refrain from doing acts, which men of learning and the Shastras did not approve of, Stubborn in his decision to do only virtuous deeds, he would brook no delay in executing them. Avarice, anger and greed are among the qualities that should be renounced, if one is to live in peace and happiness. Even under the most adverse conditions, one should not give up courage, truth, patience, rectitude and charitableness. To the strong, endurance adds prestige, and to the weak, it is a source of strength.

In a discourse Sri Sengalipuram Anantarama Dikshitar dwelt at length on what is known as "Vidhura Needhi" -the advice given by the chief counsellor, to the agitated King Dhritarashtra on Dharmam, with the hope of making him realise his obligation to return to the Pandavas their share of the kingdom.

Vidhura told the king that anger was the starting point for other passions, which obstructed the path to salvation. The adage "time is a great healer" was more true in respect of anger than others. Anger would run itself out in course of time and the desire to wreak vengeance on the opponent

would vanish. The Atharva Veda contained, inter alia, certain acts, which, if done without a flaw, would cause evil to others. These karmas had been purposely made rigorous, complicated and elongated -- the idea being to allow some time to bring down the heat of one's anger. A person performing the karma would, in almost all cases, get vexed and impatient half-way through, and ultimately give up the idea of revenge. Vidhura said it would be a grave folly to try to achieve stupendous tasks, if one did not have the strength of Dharmam on his side. The ruler of a country should be careful in choosing his advisers and allies. To befriend opportunists and antagonise true friends would result in self-annihilation. Procrastination, lethargy and fear should be discarded. Knowledge, unless combined with association with the virtuous (sat sangham) would lead to ahankara. A king should not indulge without limit in kama, drinking, gambling or hunting. He should avoid lavish expenditure. One who does not rejoice over other men's suffering and one who does not live for his own well-being are truly great. Any amount of teaching of Dharmam or virtue would have no effect on a lunatic, a person whose concentration was engaged on something else, and on one who was under the influence of anger, kama, hunger, fear or liquor. To impress on Dhritarashtra the need to stick to fair play and justice, Vidhura narrated a story relating to Prahlada. Even when his own son's life was at stake, Prahlada did not deviate from the path of Satyam and upheld the contention of his son's opponent. But all the advice of Vidhura proved a waste.

November 17, 1964

Nature of a true gift: Markandeya's exposition 17.3

Alms-giving should be regarded as part of one's duty, which it will be sinful to discard. A gift made in the expectation

of name, fame or reward will be devoid of its value. Sage Markandeya commended to Yudhishtirar the example of King Sibi, who without even the slightest hesitation or displeasure killed his own son and made food of him to satisfy his guest (Brahma in disguise). When Brahma asked what made him do that grievous act, the king replied he felt it was his duty to please the guest and that failure to do so would be a sin. (Sibi's son was later restored to life by Brahma).

In his discourse Sri T.S. Balakrishna Sastrigal said that the dialogue between Markandeya and Yudhishtirar was itself an exposition of Dharmam. The sage related an anecdote about Sibi and three other kings to explain what constituted the noblest form of Dharmam. One king claimed ownership of the cattle which he had already gifted away, while the second gave as a gift his horse to a scholar, but afterwards cursed him (in his absence) for having asked for it. The third king described his chariot, out of humility and courtesy, as Narada's, but did not actually part with it. Sage Narada told the three kings that these blemishes in their otherwise clean record of Dharmic deeds lowered their ranks, compared to Sibi. Narada acknowledged Sibi to be superior even to himself.

Markandeya explained that a person became great by faithful adherence to his duties (swadharmam), giving alms to the worthy, speaking truth and leading a pious and righteous life. Persons committing sins and leading an immoral life seemed to prosper, while the pious, God-fearing and noble suffered. It was one's own deeds, good or bad, that resulted in happiness or sorrow; but it was impossible for men to cite one specific deed as the cause for the happiness (or sorrow) one enjoyed (or suffered) at a particular point of time. God, who is the Sutradhari, established that link. Whoever, endowed with wealth and comforts in the present life, used them for performing good deeds would be endowed with a happy living

in future birth; whereas one who committed atrocities, harmed the good and defied the Code of Ethical conduct, would be happy neither in this birth nor in the births to come.

Every creature in the universe is bound by certain rules of behaviour. If anything goes wrong, though insignificant by itself, a series of reactions will be set in motion causing major disorders, which result in serious consequences. When it becomes impossible for the good to discharge their duties, because of the deeds of the wicked, God takes an avatar and sets things in order.

March 2, 1965

Factors that inhibit man's progress 17.4

Listening to the exposition of scriptural texts has been prescribed as one of the methods to secure the knowledge of the Self. "Will it not suffice to do the learning off and on instead of daily" is the question raised by some. Others wonder at the very purpose of hearing such expositions.

Philosophical and religious matters cannot be understood by attending a lecture or two. By continuously visiting the places where such themes are analysed, discussed and commented upon, it will be possible for a sincere man to grasp the fundamental doctrines. Gradually he will be able to digest even intricate injunctions. Unless the utterances in the Sastras are constantly listened to man is sure to forget them. Man's knowledge is covered by layer of dust in the form of ignorance and dissertations help him to wipe it out and make him realise Truth.

In his lecture Sri Abhinava Vidhya Thirtha of Sringeri referred to the three factors which inhibit a man's progress - greed, anger and stinginess. At times, a person is jealous of others enjoyment, feeling unhappy that he has been denied the same. If he does not have what he likes, he feels depressed, and frustration makes him angry. Man cannot totally eschew both desire and wrath but to a great extent, they can be kept under check, and it is in this context that scriptures provide the guidance.

The Sringeri Sankarachaya narrated the tale of two intimate friends who vied with each other to marry a damsel (a creation of Brahma) to highlight how lust destroys even close friendship. He advised people to cultivate contentment and enjoy what God has bestowed upon them. His Holiness also cited the instance of a parsimonious man who hid his accumulated money in a river bed, hoping to retrieve it later but lost it entirely in the floods. The money could have been used for charitable purposes. Acts of nobility, upholding Dharma, gaining knowledge through a study of Vedantic texts, leading a life of contentment, helping the cause of the have-nots will all help to keep one's mind pure.

January 28, 1982

Dharma holds key to an integrated life 17.5

Human life represents progress from animality to excellence -- not a static, cyclic repetition of biological necessities. It is an advancement from the transient to the permanent, from ignorance to wisdom and from mortality to life immortal. Progress is also a dual process of conserving

the values which we have acquired and adding on to them in order to meet the contingencies and demands. This is the motive behind the aspiration for wealth, which gives us the wherewithal to indulge in legitimate pleasures. To lead an integrated life without stress and tension, without Jealousy, greed or hatred of fellowmen and in peace with outer Nature and the vicissitudes of fortune, we need a golden key -- "Dharma". Lord Rama demonstrated that He had secured all the three with this marvellous instrument. He symbolises Dharma. His life presents an integrated picture -- of vital satisfaction, aesthetic longings, social pleasures, fame and popularity. The Ramayana is not just a "guardian" of the past -- it is a light that will guide humanity for ever.

In the present world of hectic hurry, no ideal attracts us except the excitement of the moment. The appeal to uphold the norms of righteous conduct, as contained in the epic, is irresistible. Those who read this mighty document will realise that Dharma is within the reach of all and it will secure all that a human being wants, if he chooses to follow the directives. Those who transgress these rigid rules will miss the real pleasures of life.

Sri Rama set His face against that wealth and power, which contravened the principles of Dharma, Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao pointed out in a discourse. "If my father's promise necessitates my banishment, I am ready for it," He declared. Dharma is the antiseptic that keeps away the toxins generated by unbridled longing for fame, etc. The Epic does not ask us to be poor but cautions that wealth should not "possess" us. Righteous conduct, as portrayed by Sri Rama, is the cementing factor, integrating the two values -- power and desire.

August 21, 1985

Dharma connotes righteous duties 17.6

The most widely used word "Dharma" is not exactly definable. But broadly, it can be said to connote righteous duties, Divine ordinances, customary usage, certain ideals before mankind, justice, equity, good conduct or morality. It is commonly understood that those who follow it are bound to be protected by God. But those who had zealously upheld it were found to be thrown amidst severe tests, indicating the greater power of destiny. When fate starts operating and exerting its influence, even the most balanced persons may falter and land themselves in trouble. Their faculty of thinking may suddenly fail to function. The Mahabharata illustrates this theme by the manner in which the five brothers who were wedded to Dharma were made to suffer despite their patience and perseverance and their keenness to adhere to the Code of Virtue. The emphasis in the epic is to help people develop their character and maintain integrity.

The classic's main lesson is about the ruinous consequences of resorting to gambling, in any form. Those caught in its grip cannot easily escape because of the temptation that it holds -- that success awaits round the corner. A person may continuously lose, but still there will be a lurking hope in him that all that had gone out of his hands can be regained in one attempt. In the case of Yudhishtirar, who accepted an invitation to play a game of dice, he ought to have thought of his constant mentor Lord Krishna. But as destiny would have it, he meekly yielded to his weakness.

In a discourse, Pandit V. Natesan explained the grief that befell the blind king because of his deep affection to his sons who, he was fully aware, were unscrupulous, jealous, conceited and power-mad. Yet, he could not overcome attachment and supported their move to harm the Pandavas.

Transgression of Dharma led to destruction because the path was not one of expediency but a necessity.

On behalf of the Pandavas, Lord Krishna went on a peace mission but the haughty Duryodhana attempted to insult Him and even harm Him. That the Lord stayed with a devotee who displayed humility ignoring the requests of even wealthy persons reveals His sympathetic preference to devotees.

August 16, 1986

Moral values and everyday life 17.7

The term that is liberally used in Scriptural texts -- Dharma -- can be defined as "morality" or "righteous conduct." It is not a commodity that can be obtained on payment. On the other hand, it is an integral part of man's life. If severed from him, disastrous consequences will follow. Man often behaves insane and acts against established norms because of his disrespect to this value.

The need to follow the Law of Righteousness has been repeatedly emphasised in Hinduism because it derives its strength from the Vedas, which are but revelations of God. Hindu religion is not the contribution of any individual. It reflects the quintessence of ancient wisdom, is valid always and applicable to all mankind. As such "Dharma" should never be violated.

But invariably it may be noticed that people conduct worship in their houses for an hour or so and go through the various austerities but during the rest of the day, adopt

deceitful means and cheat other, whatever may be their sphere of activity, forgetting the very purpose of their earlier prayers to God. They feel that the pooja they have conducted will offset the effects of the violation of the moral code while they are engaged in the irrespective professions. There is a big hiatus between our personal life and moral activities. Because of this factor, people act selfish, turn cruel and behave perversely. People do visit temples and carry out other types of religious duties but do not rigidly follow the rules of Virtue in their trade or official business.

Sri Vishwesha Thirtha Swami of Pejawar Math in a discourse said moral values cannot be separated from man's day-to-day functions. Every act of his should be dedicated to God and discharged only in a righteous manner. Others should not be defrauded or cheated. The purpose of observing religious austerities is to apply the Moral Law in the profession that one practises. Dharma is what the soul is to the body. Even as a soul-less body (a corpse) is detested, a life that has no moral base (not adopting the Code of Ethics) is purposeless. Hence, all efforts should be taken to see that Dharma percolates.

October 12, 1987

Sacrifice, trait of noble life 17.8

Man's existence should be guided by certain principles. Each one of us must have an aim in life which ought to be fulfilled. Invariably, people on their onward journey regret (when they leave this world) that they had not achieved anything and that they travelled all along without a purpose. Whether successful or not, (during their stay here), they ought to have conducted themselves with others in utter humility.

Sacred texts plead with people to treat those in a lower strata, with kindness and not to injure their sentiments. Spiritual knowledge acquired should reveal to them not to commit the mistake of identifying the body with the soul. The lives of several great men remind us of the sacrifice they had done. while some had adopted even deceitful methods to gain power.

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse cited the story of Karna who donated all that he had in response to demands for donation. A king on his rounds saw a creeper on the roadside seeking a support to grow and he left his chariot to enable it to climb on it, walking back to his castle. But the episode of another ruler Kumanan was different. When his brother wanted to become the king, he handed over the reins of administration to him without any hesitation. Generous as he was while occupying the throne, even when he was residing in a forest all alone without power, he obtained the rare gem that a cobra possessed and gave it to a poor poet who wanted help. The latter informed the ruler about his brother's rare gesture. Growing jealous of Kumanan's popularity, the ruler announced the gift of a kingdom for one who obtained his head. Even for this, Kumanan agreed and when his severed head was presented before him, the younger brother felt ashamed and regretted his own avarice and for the injustice meted out to the elder brother.

On the other hand, contrary to this inhuman behaviour, the Ramayana highlights how Bharata refused to accept the kingdom that was thrust on him because he felt that it legitimately belonged to his brother Rama. He never expected his mother to have been so unkind as to deprive Rama of His emperorship. Till Rama's returned from exile, he administered the country only as the former's regent. Power did not corrupt him as in the case of Kumanan's brother.

January 26, 1993

Morals may be taught only to the deserving 17.9

There can be no greater folly than to explain the subtleties of the Law of Virtue (Dharma) to a man, who is hungry because his entire concentration will be on obtaining his next meal. An empty stomach will not be receptive to expositions on philosophy. Equally vain will be to repeat these intricacies to one whose belly is full as the tendency will be to go to sleep.

Sacred texts convey, to those, who are willing to submit themselves to God, the procedures to be adopted to reach Him through different episodes expounding Dharma. Scriptural injunctions when obeyed will make man perfect; Religious exercises like offering worship to God, praising His glory, doing only good, maintaining moral purity and abstaining from pernicious deeds will cleanse the mind, in turn ensuring spiritual progress.

There is no point in unfolding the nuances of Moral Law to certain categories of persons, who, instead of listening to them, may deride and even question the very need to follow Dharma. The Mahabharata contains a dialogue between Vidhura, an embodiment of piety, resoluteness and perfection, and Dhritarashtra, the cunning blind emperor, who harboured vicious thoughts. Vidhura lists a number of persons to whom discoursing on righteousness will only be an exercise in futility.

Sri Vidhyadheesha Thirtha Swami of Palimar Math, Udupi, in his lecture referred to the categories of people on whom scholars should not waste their lungs describing ethics, morality and the concept of Dharma, as enumerated by Vidhura. Haughty persons, who always parade their arrogance claiming intellectual superiority will not listen to any advice. Sometimes such

men will however seek Divine grace to achieve success in their plans. Persons, who are apt to forget in a few hours what is taught, should not be given instructions on such topics.

Men of unsound or unbalanced mind, those who are indolent, lethargic and are tired will also be apathetic towards such vital matters. So too are the hungry. Lord Krishna in His Gita says that those who are moderate in eating, sleeping, and in enjoyments will have tranquility of mind and be free from afflictions. The misers' thoughts will be on conserving their wealth and so they should be excluded. Even if they decide to donate, they will first calculate the return they may get. Those, who are perpetually in the grip of inexplicable fear, always fidgety and yield to passion are others in the roster of the prohibited. Dhritarashtra combined in him all these disqualifications. 'Add one more', says Sri Madhwacharya referring to those, who are inherently impetuous, wicked, conceited and vicious.

February 24, 1994

Virtues promote happiness 17.10

Sages and saints have left a rich legacy for the benefit of posterity. This treasure is still available in the form of guidelines which when followed will result in obtaining peace and bliss. One among this galaxy of such masters was Rishi Gautama, who prescribed eight personal qualities which when cultivated will enable a person to enjoy happiness. If all of us adopt them in our lives, the world will become a better place to live.

The sage starts with man's need to display compassion towards al beings. God has nothing whatsoever to achieve

for Himself but still on account of His mercy and His desire to uplift mankind has taken many incarnations. The tendency to relieve the suffering of others is compassion, which occurs naturally among some while in some others arises due to the company of Godly persons.

The second quality is forbearance. Even though a person may have the power to take action or retaliate, still he should forgive the wrong doer. The Ramayana points out how God-incarnate never recalled even a hundred wrongs committed against Him but was satiated even with a single favour extended to Him. Anger burns the very person who gives room to it. The third trait is not to find fault with others who are competent, prosperous or famous. We should appreciate the good in others and not search for their defects.

Purity is the fourth requirement. One should maintain personal cleanliness and see that the surroundings are hygienic. The fifth essential is avoidance of lethargy. Many may give excuses for not being in a position to carry out their duties. Laziness should be totally eschewed. Instead, a person should show zeal in discharging his obligations. Auspiciousness accounts for the sixth noble quality. It is necessary for a person to speak and conduct himself in a pleasant manner, not put on a wry face. Manu has said Do not verbalise a distressing truth. Do not say anything that is gratifying but false.' Lord Krishna adds, "Speech that causes no pain, is true, agreeable and beneficial, and the practice of studying the scriptures constitute austerity of speech."

In a lecture Sri Abhinava Vidhya Thirtha Mahaswami referred to the 'Absence of niggardliness' as the seventh requisite. Hoarding and not parting with anything for charity arise out of greed. A person should realise that he cannot carry his wealth when he leaves the world. The last of the eight qualities is 'Absence of attachment' as most of our problems

stem out of our worldly desires. A detached man experiences inward joy. Virtue alone will accompany a person to the next world.

October 25, 1995

Cultured mind only can grasp truth 17.11

Scriptures emphasise that human birth is rare to get and it is only after several births in the lower order of creation that one evolves to the human stage. This fact must constantly remind us to make the best use of this opportunity given to us to realise the goal of all human endeavour -- to realise our spiritual nature which will liberate us from rebirths.

All actions we perform in our daily life must be oriented to this goal and for this it is essential to understand how we must lead our lives. What distinguishes human life from animal life is the pursuit of values and righteous conduct, guided by the gift of discrimination we are endowed with, which animals do not have. Otherwise if we allow our instincts to dictate our lives we will not be different from animals.

In his address Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Swami said, Hindu religion emphasised that man could rise to the level of the Divine. Before we can aspire to realise the Divinity in us we must atleast learn to live like human beings. It has become imperative to emphasise this point because modern life has become so divorced from values.

Man is today after ephemeral sensual pleasures which give momentary gratification. To wean the Senses away from

material objects it is necessary to have control over the mind. For this we have to find ways to develop one-pointedness of mind. Fine arts like painting and music help in achieving mental concentration. Lofty and noble sentiments are the outward expression of a highly developed mind which is known by the term 'culture'.

We have had a long cultural tradition within the fold of Hinduism which has expressed the spiritual ideal through various arts which have flourished since the Vedic tımes. Instead of debasing the natural instincts of man, pursuit of fine arts seeks to enrich the mind. Culture thus must actualise the inner spiritual potential of man and not push him to the level of a beast.

It is the pure mind that has become one pointed which can grasp abstract ideas necessary for understanding subtle philosophical truth. So, in our cultural tradition our pursuits are all wedded to the highest ideal of spiritual perfection and this fact should make us pursue and take pride in our culture.

Dharma or righteous conduct which is the basis of our culture and religion must express itself in the life of man. It is not something to be pursued divorced from our daily life. If we abide by Dharma it would protect us said, Sri Vijayendra Saraswathi Swami in his address. When we adopt Dharma in our personal lives, it leads to the well-being of the society and prosperity of the entire world.

March 13, 1996

Man reaps the results of his actions 17.12

What is the relevance of the ancient Law of Virtue when we are now achieving tremendous advancements in the

scientific and material spheres? Such a question is being asked by some and their doubt arises about the lack of understanding regarding the nature of this Law and its greatness and about the sublimity of the Vedic revelations which are the source for this eternal Moral Law.

Millions of years ago, the Vedas declared that the stability of the entire universe, in fact its very survival, is dependent on righteous conduct. God has prescribed it for us in the form of the Vedas. Some raise the query, "Does God appear before us and give these instructions. If not, what then is the meaning of Divine grace?" The fallacious reply by a few is, "All these appear to be concocted by some to deceive the common man."

But the ancient spiritual authority has provided the suitable explanation, "God's grace does not mean that He will go about with a staff in His hand, as a shepherd does when he drives his animals to a meadow. On the other hand, He bestows on us the proper motive for action. Every move we undertake is stimulated by an urge to do, which arises out of a desire to perform that particular action. Without such a spur, we will not act at all."

Where does this desire and urge for action stem from, is the next question. The only satisfactory answer is that it comes from God. If so, the sceptics say, such an urge should only be for the performance of pious deeds. Why then some have the tendency to indulge in wicked acts? Does God ask you to do evil acts? Will He, who is the object of our veneration, goad us to perpetrate bad deeds? Here too, the Law provided the answer.

Sri Bharathi Thirtha Mahaswami of Sringeri in a discourse said, since a person reaped the consequences of the evil acts he had perpetrated in his previous births, God gave him the

appropriated desires to make him experience the fruit thereof. God does not therefore become responsible and He cannot be blamed. In the succession of births one experiences the fruits of actions done in previous lives in the subsequent ones. The process is continuous and hence the concept of reaping the result of past actions is neither improper nor unscriptural.

If a sword is handed over to a young man for use in case of a war, and he chops off his own head with it, whose fault is this? Likewise, if a man who is asked to uphold the Divine commands (contained in the Law) does not use the power of discrimination and does not understand the teachings contained in the sacred texts, the fault is man's. Man should hence decide on the correct course of action.

April 3, 1996

Do not yield to worldly pulls 17.13

Forgetting that he has come from God and that his duty is to return to Him, man yields to worldly temptations which are too strong for him to resist. He may not like to indulge in trivial pleasures but is drawn towards them and finally finds it difficult to secure release from their clutches. A spider weaves its web to catch the moths to eat them. But, later it finds itself trapped in its own web. Similar is the case of a human being.

Man's life and efforts should hence be directed towards achieving four aims -- to conform to the Law of Righteousness, to earn wealth and to enjoy benefits and ultimately to gain salvation. No one is asked to be indifferent to worldly

activities. Life on earth should be lived in full measure but man's deeds should be regulated by the vision of righteousness keeping always the goal of liberation in view. Hence young men should take greater interest in religion and have faith in the words of spiritual leaders, more so as they have a full span of life before them.

Human birth is a special gift as man alone can meditate on God and realise Him. Man's life is a journey towards this end. Even as a traveller goes through all formalities when he has to reach a foreign country, a person in his spiritual journey should also get himself fully equipped. Through prayers and in the company of saintly men, one can achieve fulfilment in life. Otherwise, he will remain entangled in mundane affairs and will forfeit happiness. In this connection, Sri Ganapathi Satchidananda Swami narrated that the Creator allotted 40 years of life each to man, donkey, dog and owl. While man felt that the years assigned to him were not enough, the others requested the Creator to curtail their lease of life. For the first 40 years, man leads a normal life. Ultimately man was asked to live for 100 years, while the animals were each given 20 years of life. From 40 to 60, (the years taken away from the donkey and added to him), he labours to earn for his family and carries a big load of imagined responsibilities making life a drudgery. From 60 to 80, like the dog, he is ever worried and develops irritability. From 80 to 100, he becomes dull, losing his faculties and blind like the owl with scarcely any interest in his very existence. Hence man, to lead a god-centred life, should engage himself in religious pursuits from his early days. He should develop devotion by following the path of virtue. The mind is the cause for both bondage and liberation. To stop its vagaries, the methods of persuasion and punishment are available. Like taming a naughty child, it has to be brought under control

with vigilance. Congregational prayer has the power of checking the mind's vagaries.

June 1, 1996

Human life must be meaningful 17.14

Man is born with Divine qualities. Just as a sapling grows out of a seed, a flower from the sapling and a fruit from the flower. God is the seed of the entire cosmos. Like the oil that exists in a seed, like the presence of ghee in milk, fragrance in a flower, juice in fruit and fire in a piece of wood, so does the Divine permeates the universe. Man is intrinsically a combination of morality, righteousness and spirituality. Unfortunately, he has forgotten these basic qualities. When the sacredness of human birth is considered, it is a pity that man has descended to a low level.

In this land where virtues like truth, righteousness, forbearance and compassion are held in high esteem, today, cruelty, selfishness, intolerance and ill-felling are rampant, Love is hardly present anywhere. For all the troubles and difficulties, conduct alone is responsible. Bad actions will lead to disastrous consequences. Hence people should develop noble thoughts and associate themselves with pious souls. Indian culture is based on the two fundamental principles, "Speak the truth, uphold righteousness." Under the influence of the Kali, two diseases have grown -- insatiable thirst for wealth and craze to wield power and position. Desire for the same is not wrong as such. But both wealth and power should be used for right causes. The occupation of a cobbler is as worthy as a top executive's.

In a lecture Sri Sathya Sai Baba stressed the need to engage oneself in good deeds and lead a meaningful life. God alone is man's unfailing kinsman throughout life and even beyond it. He is the only constant companion. One of the methods to cultivate humility is not only to bow before God but also prostrate before holy saints and obtain their blessings.

Once Emperor Asoka was going round his capital accompanied by his minister. When he saw a Buddhist monk, he placed his head at the latter's feet and bowed, an act which was not liked by his minister. Sensing this, the ruler asked him to fetch the heads of a goat, a tiger and man's. When they were brought he asked the counsel to sell them in a market. While the heads of the animals had buyers, no one came to purchase that of the human being. There was none even to take it free. The king then said, "This head has value only when there is life in the body. Hence when there is an opportunity, place your head at the feet of noble men and secure their good wishes." Men should look at the world with the vision of peace, love and compassion. When their hearts are filled with such genuine love, they will experience the Divine everywhere.

October 23, 1997

Ignorance makes us criticise God 17.15

Very often people accuse God as being cruel since He has created this world full of sufferings. While some enjoy prosperity,others wander about, driven by hunger and poverty. If God, as described in holy texts, is extremely compassionate, why should He enact this "drama"?

God is neither partial, nor iron-hearted nor unconcerned about humanity's ills, as some allege. He is ever merciful and will always be ready to protect them. A safe path is shown by our parents for our worldly progress and if we do not follow it, we will fail in our lives. Likewise God, in scriptures, has prescribed certain directives for our good. If we transgress these Divine commands, we shall meet with problems. To blame God, for our difficulties, and attribute cruelty to Him, all the while committing violations of God's words, is hence wrong. The cause lies within us.

A mother once sent her two sons (called Viveki -- discrimination, and Aviveki -- non-discrimination) to the town, asking them to take the strong bridge to cross a canal on their upward journey and return by another bridge which was weak, but use sticks as supports. The former obeyed what his mother had said and came back safe. The other defied her warning and fell down, because of his indiscrimination and arrogance. This parable applies to mankind also. God, who has created us, has also provided us with the ephemeral. Without making a distinction between the two we commit follies resulting in misery. As told in the story above, we are not willing to use the stick of discrimination given by God. If everyone obeys His orders, there will be happiness and peace.

In her discourse, Mata Amritanandamayi said, our ignorance makes us criticise God of being indifferent to us. It is akin to constructing a dam across a flowing river and diverting its course and complaining of shortage of water, forgetting that it is man's own making. Likewise, we have built a dam of ignorance and blocked the flow of God's grace to us and then we blame God, though we are ourselves responsible. If His commands are followed, He will surely extend His protection. We should offer our prayers and submit ourselves to Him pointing out that we have unfortunately

been thrown into this forest of transmigration. Like the ferocious wild beasts, latent wicked tendencies within us threaten to devour us. There is none to take care of us amidst such situations and God alone is our eternal companion who is ever ready to extend His grace.

December 10, 1997

What Doctrine of Karma means 18.1

Adversities often compel a person to blame God, little realising that the Divine agency shows neither partiality nor favouritism to any of His own creations. The wealth one enjoys or the poverty in which he is steeped are but the consequences of his past deeds - noble or wicked as the case may be. One who comprehends this Karma doctrine will never be afflicted with despair when he faces upsets. To accuse God for one's own misery will be like mistaking as "torture", a doctor performing a minor surgery on one patient, while administering only a tablet to another, not knowing that the cure depends on the root cause of the malady. That is why one should be pious and devoted and extend liberal charity to righteous causes, to make sure that he will be born distinguished, in his next life. This moral is projected in the legend connected with Meenakshi, an incarnation of the Divine Mother.

In his discourse on Thiruvilayadal Puranam Sri Swaminatha Thambiran said, in return for her dedication in her previous life, a celestial woman was privileged to have the Divine Mother manifesting as her daughter in her next birth. This divine child grew into a dazzling personality, ruled the Pandya kingdom from Madurai and ultimately had Her re-union with Lord Siva.

January 24, 1973

Jain view of Karma 18.2

Some people in the world are wealthy, some experience happiness and some are charming while on the other hand,

many wallow in poverty or go through misery or are created so uncouth as to make them feel hesitant even to mingle with friends. What are the contributory factors which place some in an enviable position, healthy and rich and others grief-stricken, weak and poor. It cannot be a matter of chance or accident. The Doctrine that controls the fate of man, is one of the pivotal concepts of Jainism. Prosperity or adversity of man is the result of his deeds -- good or wicked, committed in this life or in the past. No one should hence be blamed for his helpless plight and his own suffering. The Jain scriptures say that man is the maker and breaker of his own fate and friend of foe of his self.

Acharya Vikrama Suriswarji in his discourse pointed out how cowardly and foolish it would be for a person to cringe for happiness from God after indulging in misdeeds and unleashing evil acts on fellow beings. Jainism states that no one inflicts punishments on man except his own Karmas. But the Jain sutras also mention that even at a time when one's past Karmas are ripe to react, the observance of religious injunctions and the Code of moral conduct can reduce their vicious effects The consequences of Karmas will become infructuous if one practises tolerance and love by following the messages given by saints and sages and by developing contentment and forbearance. Every one should realise the power of spiritual endeavour which can nullify the impact of Karmas and get freed from their bondage. One can intensify the good karmas to raise one's fortunes to the peak. It is also possible to entirely change the nature of one's Karmas.

January 2, 1980

Faith in God can free one from rebirths 18.3

That one should develop intense faith in one's personal God, hope for deliverance from the cycle of rebirths and believe in the theory of Karma is among the basic teachings of Saint Manickavachagar.

Rebirth, according to him is an incontrovertible fact. By being born repeatedly the soul gains spiritual knowledge and attains God's kingdom. As a human being one is given the choice to tread the path shown by God and His deputies. As the adage goes "As one sows, so one reaps", a man's noble deeds or his misdeeds result in his birth in a pious family or amidst evil forces. Saints therefore plead with us to uphold the principles of virtue. The Karma theory is accepted by all, excepting one group.

Love of humanity and righteous conduct are the fundamental requirements for this kind of life. The soul must get rid of the taints of ignorance, Karma and Matter, saints advocate.

In his discourse on Thiruvembavai Pandit V. Natesan explained the steps taken by the saints sent by God to arouse men from their slumber and kindle their inner consciousness. The purpose of religion, as Manickavachagar defines, is to unify mankind. He urges men to be pure and humble. The welfare of other human beings should be a devotee's chief concern.

The essence of the teaching of Nayanmars was to make everyone regard the other as his own self. Even though the saints belonged to different religions, they prescribed a standard pattern based on piety. Contentment was another vital

virtue they asked man to cultivate. The rites they have prescribed for performance by him are chiefly intended to develop internal purity.

Common to Saivism and other beliefs is "Paavai Nonbu", widely practised in earlier days. The month of Margazhi is chosen to seek the blessings of the Divine Mother by observing strict austerities.

January 13, 1982

Why man takes several births 18.4

Every action of the individual inevitably leads to some results, good or bad, and his life becomes conditioned by the consequences of those acts. That is an inexorable Law. No act fizzles out without producing results and the person has necessarily to take several births since the results of all the actions have to be experienced. Impelled by desire, man engages himself in a variety of activities and there is naturally an accumulation of their results.

Thus the deliverance of the soul from the bondage of the body becomes a far cry. Everyone, however, wants unalloyed bliss, free from even a trace of sorrow and that is possible of attainment only from deliverance (Moksha). Hence, the question arises as how to free oneself from the effects of the various acts he has to perform during his sojourn on earth.

There is no escape from one's duties according to the Lord's injunctions though it is common experience that man's nature is to have recourse to what gives him pleasure but to recoil from what gives him pain. Everyone should perform,

the duty that has fallen to his lot. Abandoning one's own duty and doing that of another enticed by ease and pleasure are harmful.

Scriptures point out that man's actions attain consumation in the form of direct results only if he performs those actions with a feeling of attachment. If, however, he acts in a spirit of detachment from the fruits of his actions, he will be keeping the road open for the soul's progress towards ultimate release (Moksha).

Sri S. R. Raghothamachar, in a discourse said the path of unselfish, disinterested service and duty leads to purity of mind and from a purified mind arise true knowledge and devotion. Sri Krishna's message to mankind is "surrender all actions to Me." Then work itself becomes worship and every act a consecration.

June 21, 1985

Keep the mind pure 18.5

Whosoever he may be - a highly-respected scholar, a multi-millionaire or a person wielding enormous power and authority - everyone has to face death. Birth is followed by death and no one is an exception. Is it not then possible to put an end to this transmigratory, endless cycle of births and deaths and enjoy unalloyed, pure, lasting Bliss? How to achieve the ultimate release and liberation from bondage?

Scriptures discuss this topic elaborately. The earlier portion of the Vedas deal with religious duties everyone should perform and the concluding portion deals with the Divine knowledge that leads to final emancipation. But, every action

produces results; the Law of Karma is inexorable and immutable. Man cannot escape re-birth since he has to experience the fruits of his actions. Hence, the seeker is advised to consecrate all his actions as an offering to God. Actions done in that spirit of dedication and surrender do not bind. Performance of actions with detachment towards the fruits thereof cleanses the mind of all impurities and makes it a fit instrument to receive Divine knowledge which alone can lead to liberation. But, it is a common experience that people start a five-minute pooja with an elaborate Sankalpa, listing several wishes to be fulfilled, said Sri Bharathi Thirtha Swami of Sringeri Math.

Adi Sankara posed the question: What is the use of even the highest position and superior joys in heaven? In the ultimate analysis, it is only Self-realisation - true understanding of one's own self - that he is not the limited psycho-physical organism he had imagined himself to be out of ignorance but he is the immortal spirit that can bring deliverance, will help him. The realised person sees the Divine unity behind the endless multiplicity and differences in the world which is nothing but mere names and forms. Self-realisation is possible of attainment only through the grace of the Lord and one should practise devotion to get this right knowledge of one's own nature.

December 25, 1986

Devotees' duty to preserve culture 18.6

Every Indian, even at birth, retains in him the spark of Divinity which gradually intensifies and keeps him soaked in devotion. Invariably all are deeply attached to God, knowing

Him to be all-powerful and that only through Divine mercy, the worldly activities are sustained. However in the case of a few, who display animosity towards the Almighty and decry religious procedures, branding them as the fictitious imagination of some who have prescribed them as the panacea for ills of the humanity. But the greatest wonder is that despite this campaign of calumny and denigration of God, the number of temples, His abodes, is on the increase. Devotion runs in the veins but some, due to their avarice and their anxiety to achieve fame and with the idea that they should "somehow" become powerful, adopt anti-God stance.

The - Sringeri Sankaracharya, - Sri Bharathi Thirtha said, all activities in the world take place only according to God's will. If Divine dispensation is the basis for what takes place, why should then a person commit mistakes and suffer? Will it not be proper that God should make people carry out only good deeds? Bad deeds follow crimes and people who indulge in them cannot go unpunished. Why they turn bad depends on the Law of "Karma" and in successive births, they commit more errors. If people want to avoid the same, they should resort to worship and prayers, which will help them to generate Devotion within. They should seek the guidance of a spiritual master. Youngsters should treat their parents with utmost reverence. Modern youth sometimes show scant courtesy and even ridicule their adherence to tradition. To say that parents are ignorant is perhaps the greatest misfortune. The country's hoary culture and heritage should be preserved. They have been handed over to us by sages and saints after so many trials, for our good and for our prosperity. If someone says that he continues to worship in his house, an idol that has been preserved over generations, we must be proud of him. Whatever may be the nature of our profession and whatever may be our individual status, two factors -- Righteousness and Devotion, bind us

together. Adi Sankara prescribed the correct way of life based on "Dharma and Bhakthi" and people should uphold the same.

May 9, 1988

The Law of settling scores 18.7

If a person's prosperity or adversity in the present life is due to his past deeds, as stated in the Hindu Law of cause and effect, how to know the acts carried out previously so that we can now correct ourselves? This query lurks in the mind of almost all of us. But knowledge of the past will only lead to complications and will disrupt the relationship between partners in life and father and son.

A parable refers to two very intimate friends, one of whom gave a sizable loan to the other when in dire need. But after sometime, when the amount was demanded, he denied having taken the money. "God alone was a witness" the giver said. Both were re-born and the daughter of the recipient of loan and the son of one who gave it, were married. The former used to visit her father often and bring back valuable gifts every time. On one occasion, she was keen to possess a silver tea- set from her father but the husband, this time, warned her that he will not part with it, indicating that "the deal has been fully settled," a statement which she could not then understand. When she approached her father as usual and sought the valuable article, the latter chided her and declined to part with it. The husband had taken back the amount loaned in prior birth and the scores were thus settled.

The Law relating to the result of previous acts is universal and it is God's mercy that we are not aware of the past, said Sri J. P. Vaswani There are several methods to take steps to ensure the progress of the soul. The best among them is to live in the company of holy men. The mind is full of impurities and the stains in the mirror of the heart could be removed through "Sath Sangh." There should be an appointment with God daily through prayers.

The Gita, the Bible and the Quran all point towards amity but we have not adhered to their teachings. While we may be proud of our sages, the latter are ashamed of us. Mere mechanical repetition of the verses in holy books will serve no purpose because a tape record can do it. It will be wise to take one verse, digest the contents, practise in life and preach them to others. God does not ask us as how many scriptures we have read. The wicked may seem to be happy but they will be inwardly jittery. The root cause of suffering is "ego" and if one gets released from its tentacles, one will feel happy.

December 11, 1991

Man's end depends on deeds in previous births 18.8

One of the Divine injunctions point out that God alone has the sole authority to create or destroy any sentient being. As such, anyone who cannot give or bring back life has no right to take it away. Whether man's passing away from this world should be easy and painless or agonising is determined by the accumulated results of his deeds committed in his previous births.

This being the case, putting an end to a person's life prematurely is certainly a crime. Some people who are not able to meet problems and who are immersed in grief for a long time may feel disgusted with their very existence and may opt to quit by resorting to unnatural methods.

References are there in sacred texts of even astute persons getting vexed and wondering why they should continue to live. So too are some who may pray to God to help them to shed their mortal coils because of certain types of incurable illness.

Why should not a person resort to any step that is not normal when he is keen not to survive any further, was explained by Sri Sugunendra Thirtha Swami (Udupi Puthige Math). Opinion is gaining ground to excuse men who attempt to commit suicide interpreting their acts as stemming from a diseased mind. Legally such an attempt to do anything connected with suicide is punishable.

Giving an illustration, the Swami referred to the terminal illness of a person. He was aged and the doctors were fighting to put off the impending end by various ways. But the old man welcomed death. His kith and kin were determined to look after him very well till nature does her job. The patient desired to see that his end is accelerated while his children were keen to save him. Purchasing a bottle containing poison and trying to consume it were entirely different acts. A rabid dog and so too a race-horse that suffers from a dangerous epidemic can be shot. But a man, even when he consents to any deed to alleviate his own agony, cannot be mercy-killed.

Scriptures give details of the future of persons who may die premature or who my depart by adopting prohibited steps. God is the arbiter and He alone has the say about our end.

Prayers will mitigate our sufferings and we can submit ourselves at His feet pleading for a peaceful journey.

August 4, 1993

Births, result of past actions 18.9

The Hindu scriptures have not been left in the form of a book. They represent the compilation of the injunctions of God, culled out by ancient wisdom, left for the good of posterity. God has provided plenty of opportunities for men to uphold these rules and gain peace and bliss. If they are followed with faith and sincerity, mankind will surely enjoy prosperity. When the directives are defied, naturally people would suffer adversity. When some fail to adhere to them, God gives one more chance so that in their rebirths, they can reap the benefits.

Out of His extreme compassion, the Lord has assured men that with His extraordinary powers. He would grant any boon to anyone who loves Him and obeys His commands. In His Bhagavad gita, the Lord as Krishna reveals His greatness and easy approachability. Those who have no faith in Him, will fail to acquire spiritual knowledge and devotional love for Him and therefore face miseries. All beings, sentient and insentient, exist in Him and He, the Supreme, is present in them. The world has come into existence from His powers but He is independent of them. He can exist without any support from anyone.

When a new era commences, God sends the souls into the world through His powers. The multitude of living beings come into existence, time and again, based on their past actions

by God's will. A question arises in this regard as why, when He is full of compassion, there should be differences among the creations, some prosperous and some in indigent circumstances. Should not all be alike? It is here that the theory of consequential results of one's actions governs re-appearances.

If one has followed God's orders, one's rebirth will be in accordance with his past behaviour. It is like a person who can draw money from a bank only if has cash in his account. Otherwise, he cannot insist on any withdrawal. The agent of the bank has no say in the matter. Like a witness, God always stands aloof. His grace is there forever but He is independent of these actions.

Sri Sriman Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami in his discourse said, that God had also explained the classification of His creation. They are not based on any consideration (like caste). One class is called the celestials and another, broadly by the term human beings who grow vertically. The third refers to the animals which develop horizontally and the birds. The last category remain stationary like the trees. There is a soul in every creation. At the time of appearance, the various parts of the body are in a subtler form and as they develop, they manifest clearly.

January 27, 1996

Repose faith in God in times of distress 18.10

Even those who are deeply attached to God, who serve Him with absolute devotion and who strictly adhere to Divine commandments are at times demoralised with the doubt whether God will respond to them or admit them into His fold because

they see men who openly defy God going unpunished. These non-believers are even rewarded, are prosperous and enjoy power, whereas those who have placed their reliance on God and the scriptures, seem to be ignored and made to experience misery. This makes them feel that they too can become atheists.

Some other God-fearing persons, when thrown amidst adversity conclude that they have been singled out to undergo trials while unscrupulous men go about parading their prosperity and happiness. But in real life, atheists may not be sleeping on a bed of roses. Their happiness will certainly be shortlived and they will not have mental peace. They cannot forever denigrate God or continue to defy His codes. It is during the period of hardship that devotees should stand undaunted and continue to hold on to God's feet. God will surely protect them. Joy and grief will alternate in life and it is in times of distress that men should display their fortitude. God's grace is source to descend on the faithful.

The Jeeyar Swami of Ahobila Math in his discourse illustrated this by the story of two men visiting a temple. One among them ridiculing tradition, went round the precincts anticlockwise and he saw a currency note, picked it and flaunted it before the other, who during his circumambulation sustained an injury and was upset. An elderly visitor explained this freakish test by pointing out that had the atheist followed the rules, he would have struck a treasure trove (which he had missed) while the believer was saved from a serious accident as the hall which he had just crossed had crashed.

Confidence of Divine intervention in crucial time was proved in the case of a boy who was asked by his father to conduct daily worship to God when he was away on a brief tour. The young devotee carried out the puja but found that the food placed before the idol remained untouched. He was about to break his head demanding that God should

take the food when He responded. The father on return disbelieved the boy's version that the Lord had consumed but found it to be true on verification. Faith establishes a link between God and His devotee.

February 6, 1996

Unique features of Hinduism 19.1

We have the rare privilege of being born as human beings and we desire to live happily in this world. Pain and sorrow, trials and tribulations, these provide the incentive to think about the course of our lives, about the causes of our griefs, and the way to overcome them. Our present troubles are the effect of some cause, near or remote. This ultimate cause of our suffering must be spotted out and destroyed. All other remedies will be only temporary and palliative. If the root cause is not tackled, the suffering is bound to recur, if not in the same form, in some other manner.

Great religious leaders directed their attention to its discovery and each of them offered a solution, which, he felt, was the best to eradicate it. The Buddha was oppressed by the sufferings he found all around him. He sought out various teachers; but none of the methods suggested by them appealed to him. Finally, he sat in meditation under the Bodhi tree and enlightenment dawned on him. He formulated his theory of illusion (soonya vaadam). He felt that the only way to remain unaffected by any trouble is to realise that everything in the world is an illusion, and, in that realisation, to remain unaffected by pain as well as pleasure.

Christianity did not correlate sin and sufferings as cause and effect. According to it, all men are sinners, and can expiate their sins only by believing in Christ. It also averred that the present is the only life vouchsafed to us, and salvation is a case of now or never. There is no future or past life according to that religion. It is the same with Islam also. Belief in Christ or Prophet Mohammed, as the case may be is the only way to go to heaven. According to both these religions, the unbelievers went to hell. As these two religions did not believe in another birth after the present one, the

entire emphasis in their teachings was on going to heaven after death.

Hinduism, on the other hand, postualtes a series of births, and proclaims that the sorrows and sufferings of each life, like its joys, are the result of our karmas (deeds) in our past lives. Consequently the Hindus do not speak of eternal damnation, as the Christians and Muslims do. The Buddha too believed in karmas and cycle of births because he was the product of the Vedic tradition.

The logical consequence of the assertion that only those who believed in Christ or in Prophet Mohammed, as the case may be, will go to heaven, is that those who were born in the world before the advent of Christ or Prophet did not attain salvation. This position cannot be accepted. Moreover, these two religions did not give a rational explanation for present sufferings or provide a remedy for them. The Hindu theory of karma and cycle of births and deaths alone offered a satisfactory explanation. Each person has "earned" the sorrows of his present life, as he has "earned" its joys, by his karmas in a previous life, and can "earn" happiness in his present and future lives, by the performance of good karmas.

The special feature of the Hindu religion is that there is no sanction in the Sastras for proselytisation. But other religions believe in conversion. Some people are genuinely worried over the gradual depletion of the Hindu fold by conversion to other religions and ask whether we should not also do propaganda for our religion and adopt the method of congegrational worship prevailing in other religions. This view led to the founding of the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha. But their hold on the public has weakened after the passing away of the founders of these movements.

If there is no suffering in this world, there can obviously be no scope for religious propaganda or for conversion. A passenger getting down from a train is beseiged by drivers of a variety of conveyances, each claiming merit for his and trying to get the "fare" for himself. The object of all of them is to take the traveller to his destination. Similarly missionaries of each religion try to get at the suffering man and tell him that by embracing the particular religion, he will go to heaven. Christianity has spread in the world through the enthusiasm of the evangelist missionary, who sincerely feels that his is the last and truest word in religion. To save the heathen soul, he uses the unlimited monetary resources behind him, feeling that there is nothing wrong in offering inducements like jobs, medical relief and education, in order to get converts, whose souls, he sincerely believes, will thereby be saved. According to historians, Islam forged ahead with the help of the sword. The Muslim religious leaders obviously felt honestly that even threat can be employed to rescue the unbeliever.

Buddhism preached ahimsa and universal love. The love that overflowed the heart of the Buddha and his sincere disciple, attracted people to that religion. The spring of life of Buddhism is this outflow of love. The core of Hinduism is the generation of love in others by the precept and practice of highly developed individual souls. The scrupulous adherence to observance of religious discipline and practices and the moral excellence of great men account for the survival of Hindu religion in such large measure, in spite of vicissitudes. The spiritual eminence of these few men and their all-embracing love, sustained the faith of the multitude, who felt drawn towards them, like bees to flowers and bats to fruits. Buddhism laid emphasis on the practice of love to all; in Hinduism the cardinal principle is to develop that love in oneself as the fragrance of the soul. The great men of the Hindu religion

did not profess to uplift or save others by their teachings: they made themselves pure and their precept and practice made for the spiritual education of those who came in contact with them. One, who is not himself pure, cannot teach others to be so.

There is evidence to show that the Vedic religion is the most ancient religion and was once current in most parts of the world. Now it has shrunk within the confines of this country, as new religions gained appearance. How did they grow? The reason is to be sought in our faltering allegiance to the Vedic religion and our fitful observance of its practices. The "weakness" of our religion, about which people are worried, is not due to our not doing propaganda for it, but to our own lack of faith in it and our own failure to conform to its tenets. In fact, propaganda is not sanctioned, for, it is enjoined that one should not be told unasked and one who has devotion, should not be told the truth. The strength of a religion does not lie in the numbers of those who practise it; but in the conduct of those who practise it. The best "propagandist" for the Hindu religion is the Hindu who lives up to its tenets. It is on account of such great men that our religion survives even to-day.

Another significant feature of our religion is that it has no name, because at one time no other religion existed. As it taught the practice of eternal Dharma, it was referred to only as Sanaatana Dharma. When other religions came into existence, they were called by the names of their founders, to distinguish them from the prevailing Vedic religion.

To preserve Hinduism, it is wrong to resort to the methods employed by the competing religions. On the other hand, we should fall back on the life breath of our own religion, i.e., on *karmaanushtaana* as taught in it. There is no need

even to combine in congregational patterns. Ours is purely a religion of the individual. When an individual prefects himself, his example will be emulated by others. The true prayer is not for getting relief from suffering, but for keeping out evil thoughts from the mind and for making good thoughts always dwell there. When misfortunes one after another overtook the Pandavas, Kunti prayed that they should be vouchsafed strength to remember God constantly. According to Hinduism, the only way to get rid of sin is to perform the prescribed karmas by which the accrued sins will be expiated and fresh sins will be warded off. The discipline of *karmaanushtaana* will make for health and for purity of body and mind. The way of religion is not to grieve over suffering, but to pray that evil thought may not get a foot-hold in the mind in moments of distress. Then the power of endurance will develop and suffering itself will lose its sting. Such a perspective is the outcome of Jnana which has to be acquired by each individual by his own efforts. That is why our religion is individualistic and not congregational in nature.

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi

Truth, first step towards God realisation 19.2

No human being is infallible but hardly a few own their faults, No one need feel disheartened when he commits a misdeed unintentionally or by force of circumstances.

If he openly expresses his regret before the Almighty and assures Him that it will not be repeated, he will certainly be granted reprieve. Everyone is bound to err at one time or another and no one is free from blemish-even as paddy

is covered with a thin layer of husk, pure water by a film of foam and gold jewellery mixed with traces of copper. Some culprits, however, by sheer luck, escape legal punishment. What is required is sincere repentance for one's weakness. Each one can worship and appeal to that manifestation of God whom he has chosen as his personal deity and call Him by any attribute but he must undertake to utter truth only.

Truth, which forms the first step towards God-realisation, alone will ultimately triumph. Harischandra discarded his empire, his wife, his son and withstood severe ordeals but refused to utter one lie. In a sense, God Himself is a thief as He "Steals" the devotees' hearts. Lord Siva is described in Sri Rudram as the "Bandits' leader" - "Taskaranam Pathaye."

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse pointed out that man's grief mainly springs out of his mistake in chasing short-lived pleasures, believing them to be genuine and permanent. He sows seeds of sorrow but expects a rich harvest of happiness. He is often compared to a tortoise, feeling merry when it is thrown in a big tank, little realising that the water is being heated from beneath. He gets lured by desires, cherishes fond hopes which get belied and is unable to extricate himself from worldly pulls because of the strong bonds of family attachments.

Advising a gathering to take a oath never to utter falsehood and reminding them of the elementary lesson imparted by Hindu religion - Sathyameva Jayate- Sri Kripanandavariar illustrated how honesty always pays rich dividends, by telling the story of a professional thief who vowed never to speak a lie. He managed to get entry into a palace and as he was about to break open the treasury, met an unfamiliar counterpart (the king himself in disguise) and by an arrangement they equally shared two of the four precious diamonds, leaving the remaining in tact. The next day, the king asked his minister

to inspect the stock but the latter. not aware of the previous night's episode, appropriated the other two gems for himself but reported that all the four were missing. The king exposed the Minister's lack of morality and replaced him by the honest thief. Devotion to God will never go unrewarded and Sri Variar explained the significance of Good Friday. when Jesus Christ, who prayed for the pardon of even his enemies, departed from this world.

April 22, 1973

No objection to pleasures sanctioned by Dharma 19.3

Hindu scriptural texts have said in unambiguous terms that acquisition of wealth is no sin; nor is there any virtue in being poor. The ancient thinkers-the venerable seers-have included wealth (Artha) in the four Purusharthas, the fundamental aspirations one should have, the other three being Dharma (righteousness) Kama (pleasure) and Moksha (deliverance of the soul). In Tamil, the four Purusharthas are described as Aram, Porul, Inbam and Veedu. All that the thinkers insisted was that wealth be earned through proper means. Similarly, there is no harm in enjoying pleasures which are not opposed to the dictates and principles of Dharma. One is entitled to all happiness that is derived from leading a pure and noble life, the individual performing his duties faithfully.

Dharma has always been assigned the first place and Moksha is the supreme goal to be realised by man. However well-placed financially and otherwise, when faced with the stark reality, he will know that all happiness he enjoys is

transitory and often mingled with misery and suffering. It is natural that he longs for pure joy, ever-lasting happiness, free from any trace of misery and pain. This supreme bliss beyond earthy existence cannot be realised so long as the soul's bondage in the body continues, which, in turn, is the result of the individual's past actions. Hence, to attain deliverance one has got to free oneself from the effects of Karma. A life characterised by disinterested service and duty and annihilation of ego has been suggested as the means to the goal.

Swami Raghaveshananda, in a discourse, said every action done with attachment, with an eye on the fruits, was binding. Man should learn to perform all secular and religious duties as an offering to God without bothering about the results. Even from the mundane point of view, his efficiency would increase as he would be free from anxiety about the outcome of his actions.

December 30, 1985

Religious duties must be discharged 19.4

God is never partial nor does he entertain likes and dislikes. He is the repository of compassion, ever ready to extend guidance to humanity. But how then can one explain the conflicting scenes in the world - some enjoying comfort while others are kept immersed in distress. Even as a judge awards punishment to a criminal, strictly in consonance with the statutory legal provisions, God administers justice based on the good or evil nature of the deeds of a person. If the latter has been adhering to the rules of righteousness, he will be richly rewarded. Misdeeds cannot be pardoned. A man

who plants a banyan seed cannot expect the yield of mango fruits, though the tree may grow to a mammoth size. There are certain duties assigned to everyone, like conducting worship, offering prayers and observing austerities.

Another cause for man's misery is the tendency to harbour too much attachment towards kith and kin, not realising that the same men who flocked to a rich person will desert him when he is deprived of his wealth. Many lavish their affection on their sons hoping that towards their declining days, there will be reciprocity and they will be taken care of. When this return-display of love is denied the hopes of the parents get shattered. There was an instance of a son blossoming into a brilliant advocate but to a client who sought to know who the old man sitting in the corner was, the lawyer, not desirous of disclosing that he was his own father told him that he was 'a priest.'

God alone is man's constant companion, Sri Bharathi Thirtha, Sringeri Sankaracharya (Jr.) said in a discourse and cited the Lord's words that the "Self" is one's friend or foe and by "Self" does one sink or swim. One's sins taint one. What is required of people who are keen to escape from the wordly turmoil is the proper discharge of their religious obligations with deep faith in the scriptural authority.

December 12, 1986

God can be seen in any form 19.5

Idolatry has a a great significance in Hinduism. Since the belief is firm that God resides within images, worshipping them fetches peace. The mind is purified and this makes a person respect scriptural injunctions and follow the directives

prescribed. The method of obiesance as contained in texts should be followed. The tradition of idol worship has been explained by saints. Adi Sankara has adored God through hymns extending from Vinayaka to Anjaneya. If these are taught to children, they will be morally stronger. Temples should serve as the repositories of spiritual knowledge and youngsters should be asked to memorise these hymns.

Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, Kanchi Sankaracharya in a discourse explained how the Vedas made one realise the glory of God, one's parents, the Acharya and the honoured guest. Adi Sankara had explained how God could be envisioned in any form a devotee liked. In each one of these variations God lives and the saint's Doctrine of Unity in Diversity has found an appeal among devotees.

Even as electrical energy originates in one place but its power is experienced in a fan or a light or in a microphone, God is one, having many names. God can be seen anywhere and in anything. Even if a person thinks of the sanctity of the river Ganges, he can experience purity in the heart. Likewise God can be conceived by anyone in any form. So too, a person should worship his spiritual mentor and his mother and father, treating them as Divine beings.

By our prayers, we will be able to get over the problems of life and swim across the troubled tides of daily existence.

The Acharya explained how in olden days, children were trained in temples in rendering devotional songs. The recitation of stotras moulded their character. Similar steps should be adopted now and young boys and girls properly shaped. Usually, people visited temples only when the were beset with problems. These were places where peace of mind could be obtained.

July 11, 1988

Justice should be upheld at all costs 19.6

God is the primordial cause for all that happens in the world. He is the motivating force for any human activity. To get educated, to secure wisdom and to obtain the wherewithal for life's sustenance, man depends at every stage on Him. This is plainly stated by the Tamil Saint, Thiruvalluvar in the very first couplet in his monumental treatise on ethics. Thirukkural, which explains how we should conduct ourselves. In the other couplets, he lays extraordinary stress on good conduct and a blemishless character. The Law of Virtue advises men to totally eschew anger, pointing out how a chain of reactions will take place when a man is seized with this bad trait.

The moral-preacher Avvaiyar has also pointed out the various methods to uphold righteousness, to develop character and maintain discipline. When desire turns into avarice, and when a person is denied possession of what he needs, dejection sets in and tension mounts within him. When calm is restored, the person who lost his temper regrets for his bad behaviour. When a mistake is committed, to escape from the consequences he seeks legal protection. Most of the disputes that go to law courts today are due to greed or personal animosity. In days of yore, there were books containing tales which highlighted moral values.

Sri Jayendra Saraswathi narrated an episode in which a housewife, taking pity on a hungry man, offered him a glass of milk. Instead of drinking it straightway, he went to a nearby tank to wash his hands and face, keeping the tumbler underneath a tree. Right above was a falcon clawing a snake. A drop of poison from the reptile accidentally fell into the receptacle containing the milk, though no one noticed it. The hungry man drank it and collapsed and the housewife thought that she was responsible for his death and started

crying. Ultimately, when sages visualised what had happened, the air of mystery was cleared and no one was declared a sinner. Destiny played its role. Bhartruhari has rendered a verse in which, to emphasise how the scale of justice should be held even and how lawyers should argue their clients' cases based on sacred facts. He has declared that under no circumstance should equity and honesty become a casualty. After God, the courts should uphold truth, at all costs.

July 19, 1988

Reservoir of power in every human being 19.7

Technological advancement has taught man about several marvels - how to fly and how to delve deep in the sea. What he has not been told is "How to live on earth with peace, amity and goodwill" with his fellowmen. For this, a person should entertain the idea that he is really greater than what he thinks.

Everyone has a reservoir of power which remains untapped. He is like a beggar who has been spending his life inside a shanty, all the time not being aware of the rich treasure that lies underneath the very place where he has been sitting. There is greatness inbuilt in a person waiting to be unfolded.

In the Gita, the Lord declares that He is seated in every heart. There are several ways to release this dynamic energy within each one. One of them is to entrust himself to God, treating Him as both father and mother and admitting before Him, "I am full of faults, accept me as I am",. "I am nothing, you are everything" should be his attitude.

Dada J.P. Vaswani in a lecture spoke about the prevalence of two contrasting aspects in each man - the nobler or the higher "Self" as against the baser or lower Self. Unfortunately, people magnify the latter comprising ego, anger, envy, illwill and such traits instead of projecting the finer ones. To develop the former and to reach the pinnacle of success, there are different rungs like determination, hope, dedication, discipline and attitude. Man should remember Lord Krishna's comparison of the bodies to garments which can be changed whereas the soul remains imperishable.

Anjaneya symbolises the soul because in the Ramayana, he is described as one having enormous powers but has to be reminded about the same, in order to display their potency. Similarly, man is not aware of the extraordinary powers lying dormant in him requiring to be kindled.

In the morning prayers, everyone should, request God to help him. The latent powers, when released, will help him to acquire greater moral strength and contribute to his work better. He will feel the inward change.

April 6, 1989

Five duties a Hindu should perform daily 19.8

For people to live in the proper manner, without indulging in anti-social activities, they should welcome the Lord in their hearts and retain Him there permanently. But this is not so easy. God will not be attracted by external show, pomp and pride which may accompany the offerings the devotees make. He does not value the material offerings as He does,

the piety in people's conduct and rectitude in life. There should be ceremonial purity which God welcomes as the best.

An incident in Bhagavatham narrates how God in human form (as Sri Krishna) was once approached by His cowherd companions for getting their hunger satisfied. The Divine Child asked them to seek the help of scholars who were conducting a sacrifice but the latter disregarded the young men's request and even treated them with contempt.

Young Sri Krishna then made them submit their request to the womenfolk (the Sages' wives) who readily responded, despite the prohibitory orders of the men and gave them the food.

Sri Vishvesha Thirtha Swami of Pejawar Math said: "We are all in the same situation. Lord Krishna is hungry even now. We cannot satisfy Him by outward forms of worship. We should behave good and help men in distress".

Outlining what God-minded men should do, the Swami mentioned the five kinds of sacrifices which are to be carried out by a Hindu daily, termed the "Pancha Maha Yagna".

The first refers to worship of the Lord (Deva) and the second to the reading of scriptures and epics contributed by sages (Rishis). The third is the duty to parents, by giving libations to them who had sustained us. This obligation does not end merely with the performance of ceremonies in their honour. The idea is that the tradition should be continued to make children realise the noble inheritance.

The fourth calls for the respect to be shown to God who resides in every creation of His and to relieve the sufferings experienced by humanity, by extending assistance in times of need or feeding them. This is "Humanism" - worship of the Lord in human beings.

The last is the kindness that is to be extended to animals which should not be killed unnecessarily for men's sport or for use as their food.

January 1, 1991

God is responsible for creation, destruction 19.9

The spiritual values and traditions of Hinduism which are valid even today require to be explained correctly to youngsters who are eager to uphold the Law of Virtue. They raise many doubts which need to be answered with clarity. There are no proper replies except for general statements which say that the scriptures direct them to do certain things.

Some of the common queries are: Where is God? Why should we worship God and how will prayers help us? Will God give what one wants, say money or a pass in the examination? Why should there be so many Gods and if one is faithful to a particular deity, will not the other Gods get angry?

Some say that devotees can obtain anything from God but one sees a neighbour who is a rogue enjoying all comforts whereas a person who works hard is not rewarded; a student who reads well finds his number missing in the result sheet while another who is not known to be good in studies gets the first rank; a girl is charming and qualified but does not get a suitable bridegroom;

How can a body which is burnt or buried (on death) get back another life? How can past actions be accountable

for one's present activities? What is the purpose of the ceremony for the dead? Swami Ramakrishna had a vision of God while those surrounding him experienced nothing; how are the messages left by sages who lived years ago be valid now? All these are the imagination of a few; why should we follow them blindly?

Swami Paramananda Bharathi in a lecture said proof about God's existence is available and facts relating to doubts can be rendered properly. A book placed on the table cannot move to another spot unless handled by an external agency. Likewise, human activities need such a force. There are several agencies, each entrusted with a function like fire, wind and earth (called elements). But there must be someone, like the Headmaster of a school assigning work to teachers, to give them the directions. Prayers are offered to express men's gratitude for what has been granted to them. Gods are controllers but there is one Supreme Being having overall control. To the question on the multiplicity of Gods, the doubting persons should be asked: "What is wrong?" Any one of the Gods may be chosen and revered. Other Gods will not feel angry at this selection.

February 12, 1993

Observe religious rules with zeal 19.10

"Let me be dumb so that I will have no occasion to use bad words or speak ill of others or abuse God and pious people; let me be blind so that I need not look with base thoughts at women let me be deaf so as to remain absolutely unconcerned when some people condemn God or spread atheistic ideas; let my legs take me to places where realised men stay; let my eyes feast on God's images and my power of speech

be of some value to praise God. My mind should not yield to the influence of wicked forces like ego, passion, anger and malice and I should ever be a man of integrity and character."

These represent the poignant feelings of a devout devotee who, after being directly accosted by God in human form, was asked to go back to the position which he had held. "Am I a sinner who had indulged in anti-God activities or harboured vicious ideas or acted against codes of pious conduct", he begged Sri Krishna. "I thought of escaping from the impact of this ocean of transmigration (family life) but you are now forcing me to sink deeper into the sea by placing a stone on my head".

Scriptures say that those who reach God's abode will stay there permanently, never to return to this world of sorrow. The sentiments expressed above were those of Akrura, an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna. He was assigned the job of fetching Sri Krishna by Kamsa so that He could be slayed somehow. After meeting Sri Krishna who agreed to accompany him, it was suggested that he should go back to his job. Hence his regret to be separated from God-incarnate.

In his discourse, the Junior Swami of Admar Math, Sri Vishwapriya Thirtha, said that on finding Krishna in His village, Akrura was extremely delighted at the opportunity givens to him to meet Him and take Him to Kamsa's palace. Krishna questioned him whether he was obeying the scriptural commands properly-like performing worship, carrying out the rites and visiting pilgrim centres. Akrura's replies showed how he was observing the religious rules with zeal.

The idea of taking bath in holy rivers was to get rid of impurities in the mind. That the daily religious obligations ought to be observed even if extraneous circumstances

interfered with a person was demonstrated by Akrura doing the minimal rites.

May 10, 1993

Religion elevates man, promotes camaraderie 19.11

Man is endowed with the thinking faculty but his life cannot be purposeful without a spiritual background. Taking food, seeking shelter and sleeping are common to a man and an animal, but the latter cannot understand the significance of spiritual values. That is why man, who can decide issues rationally, is called the crown of all creations. His thoughts, words and deeds should be identical.

Cultivation of a religious outlook alone will help him face and solve problems. He is provided with plenty of opportunities and the choicest gifts in life, enabling him to develop as an outstanding personality. The role of religion is to lift him to a higher plane and take him to the realm of 'reality'. From time immemorial, religion has enabled him to uphold traditional values and follow a civilised path. A society which loses its religion will gradually degenerate into a state where culture will also find no place.

Of late, there has been a feeling among some persons that religious practices need not be adhered to and that "outmoded and outdated beliefs" and customs have no relevance now. But spiritual life and adherence to religion will keep man off the track of fanaticism. Religion brings enlightenment, unites men of different views, develops a sense

of camaraderie and makes him think and act, said Swami Yati Maharaj, Head of the Gaudiya Math.

Modern India suffers because it is losing its cultural moorings. When a country's political development is guided by spiritual traditions, there will be progress on the proper course. Religion should form part of man's life and the heads of religious institutions, who have inherited a rich legacy, should act as guides but they should not seek political help. They are forever servants of God, dedicating themselves to the welfare of the people.

A king of Orissa was a staunch devotee of Sri Chaitanya. Once another devotee misappropriated treasury funds and was awarded death sentence. Other devotees approached Sri Chaitanya, urging him to request the king to save the man, as they were certain that the ruler would heed any suggestion from him. But Chaitanya left the capital without saying anything as his interference would mean seeking a favour, which he did not want. Anyone who has developed devotion to God and takes to a Divine life should attach himself only to Him and should not beg mortals.

July 8, 1993

Hinduism is universal in character 19.12

The edifice of Hinduism has been founded, erected and fostered by sages, saints and illustrious spiritual guides. Hence the customs, usages and traditions which are being continued have eternal validity and they can be scientifically explained. The scriptures are not myths as some say.

Every act has a deep significance. Unfortunately, the cultural history of Hindus has been distorted by some 'vested' interests who have made a 'criminal' approach towards this Faith. This ancient religion is universal in character and desires that the entire humanity should be one. To prove this, it can be pointed out how Hinduism has never believed in conquering other countries or forcing members of other Faiths to join its fold. A Hindu can take legitimate pride in his cultural and religious background and in preserving its heritage.

Some people brand Hindus as fanatics not aware of the glorious traditions they have imbibed. Facts have been twisted in respect of various rites and rituals. It is misrepresented that in the sacrifices conducted, animals were killed. This is far from truth. The Sanskrit lexicons and dictionaries sometimes give various meanings for the same word. Hence proper interpretation with reference to the particular context is necessary. Thus instead of criticising Lord Rama as having partaken meat, it can be seen that He consumed the root of a tuber which, after due processing appeared like flesh.

Swami Sathyananda Saraswathi (Ramadasa Ashram) in a lecture referred to the wisdom of the ancient in that they had possessed light types of aeroplanes, including the familiar Pushpaka Vimana. Different varieties of metals were used in their manufacture. The Vedic Mathematics were being adopted to solve problems. But modern students were being taught distorted versions. Even Swami Vivekananda as a boy was told that their fathers were fools, grandfathers lunatics and Hindu scriptures were false. On the other hand, the discussion between Rama and Vasishta brings out valuable information on human behaviour. Scriptures spell out the significance of circumambulation (clockwise) in temples and why the bride always sits on the left side. The fact that Rama befriended the hunterchieftain Guha and an aged woman Sabari would

show that there was no discrimination and Hindu Religion is not sectarian.

October 21, 1993

Religious tolerance unique to Hinduism 19.13

India has cradled several systems of philosophy. The tenets of all religions are tolerated, and even a man who denigrates God is allowed to have his say. Among the believers of God, there is plenty of scope to pursue paths of their choice. Siva, Vishnu, Muruga and other forms are worshipped and different shades of opinion prevail and this is the great spiritual heritage of this country. When confusion prevailed among people on account of the misrepresentation of the scriptures, Sankara gave hopes of revival of the Vedic thoughts but his teachings could reach only a few at the elitist level because of the then circumstances. Ramanuja appeared on the Indian scene about ten centuries ago and taught the simple philosophy of devotion to God. He denounced religious practices on the basis of caste and embraced all sections into his fold. He introduced reforms in temple administration and advocated the path of surrender to reach God.

"There is no difference between man and man in the midst of the Divine, but all the distinctions as high and low are due to His will; in this world of diversity and multiplicity, man should develop his mind to see oneness in all human beings and this can be achieved only by love of the heart and compassion to others," was one of his messages. God's mercy, grace and love are there for all beings. To obtain

His grace, one should approach Him through a spiritual teacher Temples are treasures left by our forbears where His grace can descend. His religion also lays a great deal of emphasis on humanistic ethics Among the three means of reaching God, devotion is the principal one, action and knowledge its auxiliaries.

Ramanuja's philosophy explains action as that performed disinterestedly, without aiming at rewards. Knowledge consists in the correct understanding of the difference between the soul and the body. A man who follows the path of knowledge is firmly established within himself and is not disturbed by outward happenings. Devotion is saturated with love and "surrender" is 'total giving' to the Lord. The act of completely flinging oneself on God's compassion is called 'Surrender' or Prapatti.

Referring to some of the important events in Ramanuja's life, Swami Asutoshananda in a lecture said, even while studying under an illustrious master, he could not agree with some of the latter's interpretations of Vedic passages. His tender feelings to humanity was so extreme that he taught the masses, the significance of a powerful 'Mantra' normally kept secret.

May 5, 1995

Lead a life centred on God 19.14

Many people are bewildered why there is so much of suffering in the world. The reply to them is that men in general, have become highly selfish and their interests are in material gains only. The result is that they have forgotten about the existence of a superior power. There is nothing

wrong in remaining a householder but one should discharge all obligations as service to God. Birth as a human being is a rare privilege conferred by God. Only man can think of the Almighty's compassion and take steps to reach His kingdom. Man's life is a journey towards this goal.

A person who proposes to travel abroad has to go through several formalities. Should he not adopt similar measures for his spiritual journey? For this, he should seek the guidance of a religious leader and repose faith in him. Some describe this world as hell because they face failures and disappointments. But they can convert it into a heaven by turning their attention to God and leading a spiritual life. If there is no instant success, God should never be blamed.

Man's efforts should be directed towards achieving four aims. He should live in conformity with the Divine Law. He should earn wealth and enjoy worldly pleasures through legitimate means and without transgressing the Law of Righteousness. The fourth end is to secure salvation. Some think that religion is meant only for the old. On the other hand, if they regulate their activities from younger days, they can lead a peaceful life.

Another mistake man commits is his failure to realise that he has come from God and his concern should be to go back to Him. He can rise to the level of the Divine or be a demon. With his power of discrimination, he can lead a life of detachment, and cultivate the habit of remaining contented. His only duty is to love God sincerely.

Sri Ganapathi Satchidananda Swami in a lecture said, blame and praise are the two sides of the coin called life. A person should accept his faults when pointed out by others and even be grateful to them. To acquire equipoise, and to train the mind to be perfectly calm amidst the pairs of

opposites (such as honour and dishonour, joy and sorrow) one has to seek the company of pious men whose vigilant guidance, can help him to go through life.

Service to the spiritual guides and to society, joining the company of saintly men, and showing respect to elderly persons with character, will make life's journey pleasant. Meditating on God for sometime daily, chanting the names of the Divine and avoiding association with evil forces which may tempt a person, will help to develop purity of thoughts.

December 5, 1995

Prayer essential in all stages of life 19.15

Prayer and worship are necessary in a man's life at different stages of development; when he depends on external supports, when he needs moral strength and when he offers his complete surrender to God for gaining spiritual knowledge. His ultimate plea to God is not to be reborn in this material world and get caught in the whirlpool of transmigration.

Every human being has two types of biographies; his external personality consists of his birth, growth, study and progress. But the accomplishments he gains are not of much importance because they relate only to the physical body. They are temporary and will be lost. The human frame will wither as age advances. These external achievements will all come to an end. Our scriptures tell us that any amount of such external achievements will not contribute to the growth of the soul or the individual.

What is important is the internal development or the growth of the "inner" personality which can be referred to

as the second biography. This growth consists in building of character and gaining maturity. Hence tradition lays emphasis on man's inner growth. Technological advancement may contribute towards the growth of external personality. Religion plays its role and takes care of man's internal development. To achieve that, we have different types of rituals. For instance, observance of festivals like Sivarathri helps to strengthen our inner personality.

There are three levels of worship to the Almighty. In the first stage of human life, people are dependent on external support to enjoy material welfare. The support from others like parents is necessary during life and hence at this lower level, prayer is necessary. Man wants protection in family life and he seeks God's grace for his survival. As he registers progress in life, he finds that it is not very wise to depend on worldly matters as they cannot be permanent.

It is at this juncture, man thinks of the "Imperishable", the Almighty and seeks His guidance. He starts worshipping a personal God like Rama, Siva or Devi. He wants to derive moral strength from God to get rid of all his emotional problems. Prayers provide this strength. Here man becomes dependent on God.

Swami Paramartananda in a lecture said, at the third level man offers his total surrender to God, when he becomes Self-dependent. Even at this stage he can conduct Puja, meditate and display his devotion. Thus at all stages man offers worship and prays. The nature or type of devotion at the final level makes him Self-dependent and plead with God, "Let me not be reborn and get immersed in the sea of turmoil."

February 20, 1996

Pious company helps in spiritual progress 19.16

The Hindu religion is a living force. Its uniqueness lies in its being based on the experience and spiritual realisation of a galaxy of sages and saints. They have built it on the firm foundation of the Law of Righteousness. The Hindu religious tradition has been upheld continuously by eminent seers and there is no doubt that for years to come the torch will be kept lit by many more to propagate its message. The different paths of approach to God's kingdom when practised will enable a person to elevate himself to a higher level and reach God. The Law spells out a charter of duties in the daily life of man to achieve spiritual progress.

The innumerable seers who had lived a life of piety, austerity and simplicity influenced and moulded the character of those who flocked to them. A saint trains many disciples, is ever helpful, does not expect or demand anything from others and holds to his principles tenaciously and his existence is only to guide men to realise the Supreme. In recent years, we have had Divine representatives like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Ramalinga Swamigal who had the vision of God.

One among such outstanding luminaries of the past, Sankara, appeared when conditions in India were in confusion and he acted as a unifying force. A philosopher, poet, mystic and a missionary, Sankara inspired the men of his days, urging them to do their duties. He did not confine himself to only philosophy but asked men to cultivate devotion. In one of his poems "Bhaja Govindam", Sankara explains that texts which one has read and mastered, the skills that one has acquired and the sciences learnt will not stand by a person when he is at the death's door. "Save yourself supplicating

to Lord Govinda", he adds. The system he taught says that God is the sole Reality.

Ramanuja was a revolutionary leader who prescribed a well-knit system for administration of temples. His chief message was that God gives Himself to those who abandon themselves to Him. His achievements during his full span of human life of 120 years, were many-sided. His disciple was Koorathazhwar who sacrificed his eyes to save his master.

The third messenger, Madhwacharya and saints like Raghavendra who came later were also great reformers. Swami Ramakrishna and Ramalinga Swamigal were both not erudite scholars in that they had no regular schooling and were fatherless but their knowledge was acquired through their association with Godmen, said Sri Sukhi Sivam in a lecture. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord explains to Arjuna, the role of constant practice in the realm of devotion and mind-control. This in turn can be achieved by ever being in the company of pious devotees.

March 19, 1996

Four stages of devotion 19.17

While it is said that a devotee is under God's loving care, it will be wrong to demand from Him that he should not experience any hardship. The Lord, is not only the most compassionate but also perfectly just. If a person had committed major transgressions in his earlier births, allowing him to go scot-free without any punishment in the form of suffering, will be a travesty of justice.

A judge who refuses to penalise a murderer on the plea of kindness will indeed be doing a disservice to society. He may however take into consideration his repentance and reduce the quantum of sentence for the crime. Likewise, God being always fair, may alter the nature of punishment to the extent possible.

There is just nothing that a devotee has to make known to God, which He is not already aware of. Further, when a devotee requests Him to fulfil his wants, how can he be said to have total faith in Divine dispensation. The will of God is infallible. It is well-known that people feel happy when they obtain what they desire and regret when they do not. Those who attune their thoughts to that of the Lord will have no reason for dissatisfaction. How can grief make devotees get upset and lament if they cultivate the attitude that pain too is in their best interest.

There is no reason why anyone cannot cultivate devotion to God. To think of Him is not difficult, for, one can mentally keep chanting His names and dedicate all actions and thoughts to Him. The company of devotees is helpful in developing devotion. At first, when an aspirant tries to fix his mind on Him, he may not have concentration but there need be no despair. Constant practice will fetch him the results and he will start experiencing peace.

A portrayal of the different stages of devotion has been given by Adi Sankara in "Sivanandalahari". In the first stage a devotee somehow approaches God, just as the seed of the Ankola tree gets attached to the trunk of its tree. Thereafter, the effect of Divine grace will be experienced and the devotee feels attracted to God. In the third stage both (the devotee and God) are close to each other and their love is mutual. Finally the devotee enjoys total communion.

On the occasion of the Aradhana of Sri Abhinava Vidhya Thirtha Mahaswamigal (the 35th head of the Sringeri Sarada Peetam), scholars recalling the advice tendered by him pointed out how he had described the conduct of a spiritual aspirant who acts with the knowledge that he is an instrument of God. He will view success and failure with equanimity and will abstain from misdeeds. Treating the scriptures as the directives of God, he will faithfully carry out the duties which are pertinent to him.

October 5, 1996

Repose faith in Divine dispensation 19.18

Very often, man stands at the crossroads wondering what he should do next to reach his goal. Likewise, when problems stare at him and his mind is in a state of utter confusion and he is stricken by remorse, he may not be able to act in a particular manner or desist from doing so. Even among those who have studied the holy texts such a dilemma may arise when confronted with ticklish situations.

It is under these circumstances that men should seek Divine guidance, when prayer to God, will surely give light. What is required is faith in His power. How can one know that God will extend His mercy? Imagine a person thrown amidst darkness when lights go off during midnight. What will be his joy if a torch suddenly illumines his path. If there is no such relief, he will have to sit at the same place, dreading the situation in which he is thrown in.

Another question that may arise in the minds of men, is how to repose faith in one whom they have not seen and

how to depend on such an invisible force and totally depend on Him. To clear this doubt a story is told of a person who fell from a cliff. Down below was a deep valley. But as he was falling, he managed to catch hold of a branch of a tree and was hanging precariously. His shouts to save him from this peril went unheeded. Suddenly there was a Divine voice from among the clouds "I shall protect you if you leave your hands." Here faith was necessary because the assurance came from a source not seen and at the same time,there was no guarantee as to what would happen if he gives up his hold on the branch. Faith in Divine dispensation alone is the answer. God will never fail to rescue His devotees.

Equally important is to approach a spiritual leader or a Master when a person experiences grief or is in need of proper guidance and obtain his advice. A real teacher will show him the right path and give him encouragement. There is no shortcut in religious pursuits, said Swami Tyagananda in a lecture. The way in which Arjuna made a sudden change in his approach during the Kurukshetra battle and the confidence that Lord Krishna infused in him are brought out in the Bhagavad Gita.

Arjuna came to the battle-field with confidence that he would win the war but at the eleventh hour, anguish and sentimental pity overtook him and he conjured up a vision of the terrible ravages of war. He was suddenly over-powered by weakness. This man, a hero of many battles said,"Instead of aiming flowers at the feet of my grandfather, the teacher and other elders, I am asked to dart forth arrows." Then comes Krishna's glorious words of encouragement, the need to do one's duty and the message to mankind.

October 10, 1996

Scriptural tradition must be upheld 19.19

The greatness of Hindu religion lies in its appeal to even the layman who may not be able to follow the rigorous spiritual exercises and not well-versed in scriptural texts. No one is infallible since his thought, word and deed will not be identical. Man is prone to commit sins but to enable him to approach God, an easy method has been prescribed, viz. to visit temples and submit his appeal before the idols enshrined therein. They are made of stone or cast in metal but they are co-eval with God.

The idols assume sanctity when they are duly consecrated by Mantras, whose meaning if known, will enable devotees to realise how the compassionate Lord will not let them down. When the 'Aradhana' (puja, religious rites) is being conducted, if the significance of the mantras are told, worshippers will appreciate their significance better. The priests should be qualified to worship the idols and should be pure and disciplined.

Azhwars and Acharyas who had visited the temples enjoyed the vision of God and have extolled His qualities. If the contents of their hymns are understood, people can share the ecstasy which the former experienced. The priests in some of the very ancient temples have not only mastered the Agamas (texts on temple procedures) but have received practical training from their forefathers and maintained the tradition.

How worship of idols fetched spiritual and secular benefits and how it was necessary for the students of scriptural traditions to seek the help of masters with faith were illustrated by Sri R Madhavachariar in a lecture. While on tour, a sage accompanied by his disciple, saw a prince sporting with women in a tank. "Let him live long" , blessed

the sage. Next they witnessed the son of a Rishi performing rigid austerities. "Let him die," was the sage's benediction.

The disciple was all the while wondering whether he had made a mistake in choosing a wrong Guru. Next the teacher said, "let him live and die," when he saw a man performing the worship of an idol underneath a tree. To the baffled disciple, the Guru explained that the prince had committed sins and so will have to go through many births for his act. In the case of the second, the young man was near God and therefore would reach His feet after death. The third was doing both, good and bad acts, as worship would fetch him rewards but he was wrong in choosing a public place.

Devotees should remember the ecstatic sentiments of Azhwars in their hymns. Temple priests should be qualified and knowledgeable in the Agamas, procedures, regulations, and must be disciplined and pure.

May 5, 1997

God, man's sole guide and protector 19.20

The human body can be compared to a rented house. When the occupant is required to vacate it, he should do so. Likewise, before one's departure from this world on the expiry of the fixed period, one should gain the necessary spiritual strength to build a home of one's own so that when asked to quit the existing temporary shelter (the body), one can happily do so and go to live in the palace of eternal bliss.

All of us are God's children. When we travel we may feel that all our fellow passengers are our well-wishers. But

they will leave us, at their respective destinations. In life too, none can be called one's real kinsmen. The only permanent relative of ours is God. A dog biting a hollow bone enjoys the blood that trickles but little does it realise that the same comes from its own wounded gums. We are also imagining in the same way. When we enjoy sensual objects, we derive momentary pleasure and think that our joy and strength are derived from them. But in reality, we are dissipating our energy. If the mind is balanced, one can bear any amount of happiness or grief with equanimity. Even worldly worries will not cause burden. Sorrows will cease to exist.

When thinking of the eternal bliss attainable through God-realisation, we will not be upset by any jolt. While walking down the road carrying a load on the head, the mere thought that the resting place is near will make the weight seem less. But if one knows that the destination is far away, that very thought will make one weary. So too if we know that God is with us, the burden of life will be lessened. Having got into a boat or a bus, why should we carry the luggage on our head? When we dedicate all our acts to God, He will take care of us.

Some people regret that even though they have been praying to God for many years, they continue to suffer. This is because, their prayers were prompted by desires, explained Mata Amritanandamayi in her lecture. Because of our desires, we see God as an agent who works for us. Though the Lord Himself says that He is a servant of His sincere devotees, yet to use Him as an instrument to get our desires fulfilled, is not a right approach.

Knowing that He is our sole guide and protector, we should try to escape from this world of sorrows with as much earnestness as one has to rush out of a burning house. Only

after developing the power of discrimination between the ephemeral and the eternal, we can lead a perfect householder's life, regardless of difficulties encountered. We must be aware that bliss is within us, and when our selfish motives disappear, we will become a fit vessel to receive God's grace.

December 11, 1997

Significance of Muharram: Aga Hussain's self-sacrifice 20.1

Nearly 1,300 years ago a battle was fought in the middle of the Iraqi desert at a place called Kerbala. The combatants were a 30,000 strong force of the imperial army of Yazid, the sixth Khalifa usurping the Muslim Khilafath (the temporal and spiritual gadi) at Damascus on the one hand, and Hussain, the maternal grandson of the Holy Prophet Mohammad on the other, accompanied by 71 men, comprising the members of his family and some close associates.

The numerical odds were unprecedented and the military victory of Yazid was indeed complete. Ali men were massacred. Why did Hussain go to battle against such silly odds? Was there no escape? Of course there was. Allegiance to and acknowledgement of Yazid as the Khalifa temporal and spiritual head was all that was demanded of him. He could easily have given it and organised a force and fought his enemy later, as any rebel leader would have done. But Hussain obviously was not thinking of escape or a military decision. What compelled him to undertake this impossible fight? Hussain was making Jehad, the holy war to save Islam and Islamic Democracy.

Abu Sofyan was the most violent antagonist of Mohammad the tribal chiefs of Mecca, when the Holy Prophet was revolutionizing Arab life and beliefs. He was the very last Meccan to acknowledge the Prophet and even then only outwardly because he coveted the rulership of the expanding Islamic commonwealth founded by Mohammad, for his own family, the Ommayyads. He manoeuvred for and got the Governorship of Syria for his son Muaviya who, after intrigues and revolts against Ali, the fourth Khalifa, seized the Khilafath itself and made this hitherto elective office, which was one of dedication to God and carried no pomp or wealth under

the previous fourth Khalifa, a regular hereditary monarchy with personal wealth and power as the sole ambition. Yazid, his son, soon succeeded Muaviya. So the undedicated Ommayyads used the devotion and institutions taught by Islam as a means to political power, wealth and splendour for their family and turned Islam into mere statecraft.

So Hussain was making Jehad against this irreligious, alcolholic Yazid, who was subverting the religion sent down by God through the Holy Prophet. The people began to worship the power and material success of the monarch and the empire as the final objective of Islam. Faith in God and the spiritual beliefs, tenets, duties and obligations which were paramount, became secondary. Islam was still in its infancy (61 years) and the massess had not yet absorbed its enduring message. The Babylonian, the Greek, the Roman Empires and civilisations had their rise and fall and were soon forgotten. If Hussain had given his allegience do Yazid even for a day Islam would have been long forgotten as a mere political stunt, which Yazid often declared it to be. Solely because of Hussain's refusal to save himself at Kerbala, Islam and Islamic precepts live on to-day even after, the fall of money Muslim empires, the Khilafath and the political subjugation of many Muslim countries.

This was the cause undertaken and fulfilled by Hussain at Karbala with his 71 men pitched against the 30,000. He achieved his object not by victory but by defeat, death and untold suffering for his family. For only thus could he have met the real challenge to the religion on a spiritual plane and demonstrated its eternal inviolability. Yazid had very cunningly tried to present Hussain's objections to his rule as purely political and materialistic with the Khilafath as the only dispute between them. But the unequal fight at Karbala where Hussain sacrificed himself and his whole family gave to the masses the lesson they needed that their faith,

duty and obedience belonged only to the Almighty and that the Khalifa was there only to serve God and His Prophet. The profound impact it had on Yazid himself (and his family) was such that their scorn for Islam changed into a deep respect for it. Yazid no longer dared to subvert and exploit the religion for his own personal ends.

Hussain's fight was a Jehad (the oft-misrepresented and misunderstood holy war of the Muslims) instead a holy war of the Muslims) in its truest sense. Jehad is permissible, only in self-defence when attacked, and only when the precepts of Islam or the Muslim society were in danger. In Jehad one did not count the odds calculate the chances, or make expedient compromises, Jehad is not an aggressive war launched for political or religious expansion, Jehad is spontaneous defiance and self-sacrifice in the face of oppression and against heavy odds intended to demoralise the oppresser and expose his injustice.

Hussain was migrating from Madina to Kufa accompanied by his entire family including ladies and children. Yazid's army halted him in mid-desert and stopped food and water supply and besieged his camp. Yazid had thus hoped to extract Hussain's allegiance. Hussain refused. In full view of the ladies and children each and every male member of the family, most of them mere youths of 12 to 13 years, went into battle and were slain brutually. Finally Hussain himself went into battle alone to the tender mercies of Yazid's men. The unparalleled saga of Hussain's massive sacrifice at Karbala and the gory deeds enacted upon his loved ones in front of his eyes and his refusal to give in to Yazid has moved millions of non-Muslims through the ages. Numerous Jews and christians of the Middle East, the Zoroastrians of Iran, the Buddhists in Malaya, Burma and Indonesia, Hindus in India and others often participate devotedly in the commemoration of Muharram, which takes different forms in different lands. The whole

world reveres the steadfastness, courage and sacrifice of Hussain, a saint among saints.

May 17, 1964 *S.S. Akbari*

Religion for discipline: Bohra Chief's call 20.2

Education, devoid of moral and religious instruction, led to - indiscipline and hence its incorporation in the school curriculum is essential and most desirable, according to Dr.Syedna Mohammad Burhanuddin, Head of the Dawoodi Bohras. Religion was basic to man's life. He could never acquire knowledge of science and the secrets of nature without the help of Divine light. Without religion, everything would be a mirage, he said. All religions taught unity of mankind. Unity was indeed the core of their messages. The complexities of modern life and the busy daily schedule need not make one abandon his religious duties. He exhorted everyone to set apart some time for devotion to God.

There was no dichotomy in temporal and spiritual knowledge. In his sermons. he had been exhorting his followers to acquire more and more knowledge in all disciplines of modern science and technology. His Holiness referred to the talk of introducing reforms in religion to keep pace with modern progress. Describing this as a wrong approach, he said it should be the other way about, progress taking account of religious teachings and the essence of religious truths. The superficial disregard for religion shown by the younger generation could be attributed to their exuberance. But he saw in the rising generation an awakening and a desire to return to religious faith and belief in the Almighty and the need to offer prayers.

He reiterated that education devoid of a moral base led to indiscipline. Ultimately it was the Government which suffered, having to confront indiscipline resulting from a lack of moral instruction on schools. He was emphatic that a religious atmosphere should pervade in schools. Loyality to the State, devotion to national solidarity and cultivation of national pride were duties cast on every individual. Education should mould him for the ultimate good of society. Patience and sincere endeavour would help in fighting the tendency among some to deny the existence of God. Religion aided in conditioning a person's mind enabling him to pursue his goal in a better manner. The basic principles governing a religious way of life could never be altered and there could be no compromise. One could take advantage of the benefits of rapid technological progress but there could be no change in religion to suit these advancements. He said he granted permission to erect new mosques only if necessary, taking into consideration the need of the members of the community.

January 6, 1977

Birthday of architect of Islam 20.3

Mohammad was a Prophet and Divine messenger, whose teachings form the basis of Islamic civilisation and whose example by almost 950 million Muslims throughout the world. The prophet, like David and Solomon, was a ruler of men and an inspired teacher. He revived the pure and unblemished creed of his ancestor, Abraham, and developed it into an international and democratic religion. He infused into mankind the spirit of rationalism and free-thinking and encouraged the growth of scientific knowledge. It is admitted by even

the bitterest critics of Islam that the Prophet was truthful, honest and sincere. He was a righteous man His life and conduct were untarnished. It is all the more amazing that a man who had never been taught to read or write has left for mankind the legacy of a book whose surpassing wisdom of ideas and beauty of language has yet to be equalled.

The book deals with every conceivable subject which can be of any use to mankind. It is both terse and lucid, highly idealistic and yet practical, emotional scientific. In short, it appeals to people of all temperaments and all degrees of intellectual developments. The Prophet was no mere talker - no mere lover of words and literary forms. He meant what he said, practised what he preached and demonstrated all the Laws of the Quran in his everyday life. His personality is historic and not mythical or semi-mythical. He was born posthumously. His mother died when he was an infant and he was brought up as an orphan by his grandfather and subsequently by his uncle. Abu Talib.

Even as a child in the household of his uncle, where he grew up among a number of his cousins, he was truthful intelligent, sober and dignified. As a youth, he was trustworthy kind and helpful, and led a chaste life. He did not participate in the feasting and revelry, the idol-worship and gambling, the wine-drinking and lasciviousness of his contemporary Arab tribesmen. He often accompanied his uncle, carrying merchandise to Syria. On one of these journeys, the monk - Buharia, was so struck by his personality that he predicted the great position which the youth was to attain. In course of time, Mohammad joined the service of a rich widow and managed her business interests so well that she married him, although he was about 15 years her junior.

So, the Prophet became an exemplary husband and a father, He was, during various phases of his life, a servant,

master, merchant, subject, soldier, general, magistrate, judge and sovereign. His life was multi-faceted. He was not a hermit who had withdrawn from the world and lived in retirement.

The pattern of his life remained as simple and austere in the days of his prosperity and affluence as it was during adversity. The Master of all Arabia, the last of the Prophets and the Chosen one of God did not wear a crown or hold a sceptre in his hand. His kindness - towards children, his personal devotion towards and services to widows, orphans and the needy, his care of the sick and the indigent were proverbial. His life was so simple in all respects that the humblest and lowliest would find it easy to follow in his footsteps and by studying his teachings and following in his footsteps, achieve a complete moral and spiritual transformation. Thought he lived more than 1,400 years ago, his life, personality and character are as much a reality to those who wish to study them today, as if his life were being lived before our very eyes. The book of tradition - or Hadith, which runs into several volumes contain the minutes and graphic descriptions of the life of the holy Prophet.

January 19, 1981 *M. Kalimullah*

The five pillars of Islam 20.4

A Muslim is one who believes in God and strives for total re-organisation of his life according to His revealed guidance and the sayings of Prophet Mohammad. He should work for building human society on the same basis. The Arabic word "Islam" means, peace, submission and obedience. The religion of Islam is complete acceptance of the teachings of God as revealed to the Prophet. Islam has been built on five

pillars, unity of Allah, the proper name for God, and messengership of Mohammad, conducting prayer for five times, fasting during the month of Ramzan; payment of "poor tax" performance of pilgrimage (Haj). The fourth and fifth are enjoined on those who can afford and are fit. These apart, a Muslim believes in six articles of faith: Allah, angels, Revealed books, His messengers, doomsday and pre-destination - whatever is destined is from Allah who is the Creator. He is one and only one. He has no form or shape. He is in existence forever and shall remain forever. He is not born to anyone. He has all the attributes like knowledge, power, hearing, seeing and speaking.

The Divine books have been given to mankind from time to time through Prophets. Four of them are major books while a good number are booklets. The final revealed book is the Holy Quran, gifted to Prophet Mohammad. It is a complete code of life, relevant for all times and climes. Allah chose His messengers to guide humanity. On the occasion of Muharram, Dr. U. Mohammad said in a lecture, the first among them was Adaru and the last Prophet Mohammad; in between, about 1,24,000 of them had appeared. Mohammad was not only an ideal prophet but was a model, the like of whom the world had not seen nor will see. A philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, restorator of rational dogmas and of cult without images and founder of one spiritual empire, and that is Prophet Mohammad. God has commanded (in Quran) "Hold on to what the Prophet has brought and discard what he has advised you against". Islam has provided guidelines for a purposeful life, reminding a person of his duties and obligations. In Islam, man's life is wholesome and integrated.

July 23, 1991

Instance of supreme sacrifice 20.5

Prophets were chosen by God and hence were intensely liked by Him. Many of them were put to stringent tests but they emerged triumphant, since these trials took them to greater and higher spiritual planes. For instance Hazarat Ibrahim had a dream that he was "sacrificing" his son, Ismail, who willingly responded to the father's desire and asked him to go ahead with what he had been commanded to do. God did not indeed ask for such a sacrifice but wanted to show what implicit obedience of His command was. The act was carried out but Ismail was replaced by a ram from heaven. This event is being commemorated in Islam during Bakrid.

After Prophet Mohammad's demise, his companion Hazarat Abu Baker took over the reins of administration as the first Caliph of Islam. The two great grand-children of the Prophet were Hasan and Husain. They were Imams (leaders) of Islam and were held in high esteem. During the caliphite of Hazarat Ali (the fourth Caliph), the Prophet's followers were divided into two factions. But the situation was "managed". Islam had to equip itself for challenges. In the new surroundings, Hasan and Husain played great roles.

Explaining the significance of Muharram, Dr. U. Mohammad in a lecture said that the Islamic Government has for its Constitution the Quran and the Prophet's teachings. At the end of the administration of four Caliphs, there were signs of departure from accepted norms; there was a swing towards establishing kingdoms and dynasties with all its attending ills. Imam Husain resolved to fight it out even at the cost of his life. Many who owed allegiance to him, invited him to be their Caliph. But since they failed to support him during the crisis, he and his little band were "cut", near Kufa and Kerbala, now a pilgrim spot. What was expected to be a friendly

union turned into a war. History records the inhuman treatment meted out to the Imam and his family. This happened on the 10th of Muharram, the first month of Islamic calendar. It is a mourning day for Muslims all over the world. They recall the event, read the Quran, fast and pray, and determine to emulate the great leader. The Imam had laid his life to uphold the traditions of Allah.

July 24, 1992

Ramadan: the season of piety 20.6

The Islamic holy month of Ramadan begins marking the onset of 30 days of fasting from dawn to dusk and spiritual communion with God for the world's one billion Muslims. The fast during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islamic faith. Other mandatory duties a muslim has been called upon to perform are to stand witness to faith (verbal admission of faith in Allah and the prophethood of Mohammad), five times namaz everyday, zakat or payment of 2.5 percent of accumulated savings or wealth or 10 per cent of the annual agriculture produce for the underprivileged people and a pilgrimage to Mecca-Madina (Haj) at least once in a lifetime.

The fast of Islam is not an attempt to enforce religious asceticism upon the faithful, but an effort to unite the religious community through a common awareness of suffering and denial. Ramadan denotes the beginning of the Prophet Mohammad's Divine mission through the revelations sent down by God through the angel, Gabriel, which began in the 610 A.D. But fasting became obligatory only after the Prophet had moved to Madina. The fasting of Ramadan places

a Muslim in a position whereby he gets attuned to continuous remembrance of God because of his thirst and hunger. It so charges a common Muslim with piety that he or she, besides the necessary abstinence from food, drink and sex, comes to avoid even common evils such as lying, backbiting and character assassination. The Ramadan fast lasts approximately two hours before sunrise until sunset. During this time, Muslims may not eat, drink or smoke. Failure to observe the fast is a heinous sin, but some categories to people are exempted

The Quran being the gift of Ramadan, Muslims are advised to read it from cover to cover at least once during the month. This is mostly done through the special namaz of Taraweeh, nearly two hours after sunset. The Prophet has also recommended that devout Muslims should spend the last 10 days in prayers and meditation in the mosque and avoid all worldly dealings during this period. This practice is termed Itikaf. Mostly one person in a locality is enjoined to perform this. The worship on the night of destiny brings forgiveness and it is worth more than worshipping for one thousand nights.

February 24, 1993 *Ayesha Siraj*

Significance of Ramzan 20.7

Id-ul-fitr, better known as Ramzan and celebrated by Muslims, is a festival with a difference. While all festivals connote pomp and gaiety, Ramzan, finalising a month of rigorous fasting and abstinence, is an event of mammoth rejoicing and relief. But far from it the festival itself has been named Id-ul-fitr, i.e., the festival of charity. Ramzan is the name of a sacred Muslim month at the culmination of which Id-ul-fitr is celebrated.

Care of the needy is of capital importance in the religion of Islam and regarded second only to prayer. More than gross economic equality, Islam as a religion, demands the universal brotherhood of man. It recognises no superior race or group of people or even priestly class. According to the Holy Quran, the best of men as regarded by Allah are those who are the best in virtues and piety, a possibility equally available to all men and women. The Prophet said: "Even if you are commissioned with a dark Negro as your leader who bears a head like a dried raisin, obey him". Thus having razed down to the ground successfully all inequalities and inequities of blood, wealth, colour, learning and power, Islam misses no chance for preserving its pet theme of universal brotherhood and charity as a complementary support to it.

Islam has commanded that even a major festival as Id-ul-Fitr psychologically reserved for merriment should be aptly engaged to meet the needs of our fellowmen. In fact, one of the factors behind the Ramzan fasting is the need to appreciate the hunger and thirst of the poor so that we can be helpful to them. Islam ordains one forteith of persons assets, one tenth of agricultural produce (if the land is irrigated by rains) and one twentieth (if the land is irrigated by manmade systems) to be compulsorily spent on the poor annually. Even women have to spend one forteith value of their gold and silver (on attainment of limit) on poor annually. This poor rate is known as Zakath and is duly executed in the month of Ramzan. The object of Islamic charity does not stop with extending support to the poor, rather it aims at raising the living condition of the poor to the point of realistically admitting them in the universal brotherhood. Even the Muslim Law of Inheritance is so distributive as to destroy concentration of wealth and promote a pious socialist society.

March 25, 1993 *T.V.A. Abdul Malik*

Significance of Meelad-un-Nabi 20.8

Meelad-un-Nabi is the day on which each one of the many million Muslims all over the world glorify the personality of Prophet Mohammad by offering prayers and singing hymns. Prophet Mohammad was born in Mecca in 570 A.D., the year of memorable invasion of that holy place by Abraham, a time when the entire peninsula was steeped in spiritual torpor, religion being gross idolatory and the faith, the dark superstitious dread of unseen things.

Prophet Mohammad held the horrors of an orphan's life by the letters and grew into a placid boy under the tutelage of Hazrath Abu Talib. The Prophet, from his early days, had sterling qualities such as love for the poor, the orphan, the widow, the weak, the helpless and the slave and, with his rare acumen and truthfulness, became the director of a merchantile caravan. At 25, he married Hazrath Khadija and had a daughter, Fathima, in lineage. His selection of Ali as his son-in-law was also a matter of merit. At the age of 40, in the solitude of cave Hria, he was invested with prophethood. The Superman Mohammad beautifully and succinctly summed up in four words the Divine Message and preached it. He is not only above all material limitations but even above the limitation of metaphor, "Nothing is like a likeness of Him."

"Qur'an" means primarily, "he read or recited". It is the celestial Book endowed to the Prophet by the Lord of the worlds, the Mighty, the Wise. It is the greatest miracle that has been vouchsafed to a Prophet. It is miracle the like of which would not be produced even if all men should combine together. Qur'an is a complete code of creeds and morals for every institution of an extensive common wealth and instructions for the administration of justice, for military organisation, for the finances and for a most careful legislation

for the poor. During the 63 years of his life and 23 years .of prophethood until he breathed his last, Prophet Mohammad remained dedicated to the Divine will to weld together the hitherto centrifugal elements into a civilized Muslim nation. The epoch of the Holy Prophet has ended but chroniclers will continue to assess the impact of his teachings. "God best knows where to place His mission" (Qur'an).

September 10, 1993 *Mir Mazhar Hussain*

Ramzan, festival of faith and fasting 20.9

Ramadan (Ramzan) is a festival of faith and fasting, signifying the dawn of an era to redeem mankind from its multifarious problems and sufferings and thus providing peace and prosperity in different spheres of life so that humanity may lead a righteous life. It was in this glorious month of Ramadan, the eternal miracle, the Holy Quran, (the words of God), was revealed to the world by God Almighty through His last messenger prophet Mohammad to deliver mankind from darkness and lead it towards light.

Ramadan is associated with the fasting for a period of 30 (or) 29 days as per the duration of the lunar month of the Islamic Calendar. God Almighty made fasting obligatory for every Muslim provided that he or she is an adult and in full possession of his or her faculties, excepting those persons in sick bed or in a journey and women under certain circumstances like child birth. But even those who are in the exceptional cases as mentioned above, should make good the number of days thus lost in fasting.

God has mandated fasting on mankind so that they may learn self-restraint and realise what is hunger and help those

in need. It is an ordinance to abstain from worldly pleasures from dawn to dusk. Not even a drop of water should be consumed even though one is thirsty with a parched throat nor an injection or taking a pill for redress from illness, is permitted. Fasting is an act unseen by others but one should be true to one's consciousness, which, firm conviction alone can achieve. It is a test for faith and the reward is abundant. Fast is not mere abstinance for pleasure of life but to cultivate love of God and to make one do every such act that would please Him. It is a shield from sins, a source of forgiveness and a reward of safety from hell. Fasting promotes benevolence and kindness. In short fasting year after year purifies the mind and tempers the body and disciplines the life of the individual and paves the way to attain God. Next comes the Zakath, another pillar of Islam, which is to give charity to the poor and is of prime importance during the month of Ramadan. Payment of one forteith portion of one's savings over a year and the cost of the movable properties, is not confined to Ramadan alone though traditionally it is predominantly given in the month of Ramadan. The holy days of Ramadan when observed with endearing fervour and love of piety will result in a person attaining limitless blessings. Lailathul Qadr the night of the revelation of the glorious Quran, is reckoned as better than a thousand months.

March 14, 1994 *S.A. Latheef*

Haj, leveller of rich and poor 20.10

Muslims drawn from all over the world refresh their communion with God year after year and demonstrate their faith in one God, one religion and one world during their Haj pilgrimage to Kaabah, the holy shrine at Mecca. It is the greatest tribute to equality and brotherhood. It is here

the message of Truth for mankind and for all time was revealed by Prophet Mohammad.

Pilgrims make a covenant with God that they will devote themselves in the true spirit of Prophet Ibrahim to the Divine mission. It is a focal point for guidance for the entire world, to frame and to practise a new social order based on piety, peace and justice, Haj is the greatest leveller of the rich and the poor across the barriers of race, colour and language. Muslims pray five times a day and offer prayers on Fridays and twice a year for Ramzan and Bakrid in large numbers. Once a year God Almighty calls them to his abode, the Kaabah, where they meet to attain greater glory of Islam. With unqualified obedience, they zealously circumambulate the Kaabah and praise the Lord and keep on chanting that they are in his presence and invoke His blessings and that they belong to Him only. The pilgrims proceed to the Valley of Mina on eighth day of Dhul Hajjah as per the Islamic Calendar, go to Mount Arafa and Muzdaliba and back to Mina on the 10th day to offer sacrifice and to punish the Satan by throwing pebbles. At Arafa, they stand together shoulder to shoulder and pray in this spirit of Islamic fraternity and brotherhood.

To test the supreme act of submission, to the will of God, comes the revelation to Prophet Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ismail. In spite of the intervention of the devil, Ibrahim with the consent of his son, laid him on the ground and placed the knife on the throat and proceeded to cut it. But God intervened and rewarded the act of absolute surrender of Ibrahim and Ismail by replacing in his place a sheep, so that it may be slaughtered. This act was made a religious ceremony which is observed by all Muslims.

Two thousand years after the advent of Prophet Ibrahim, his prayer was answered by God and the last Prophet Mohammad was born. who inspired and spread the message

of universal brotherhood. The pilgrims pay a visit to Madina which has been the home of the Prophet before winding up their pilgrimage. Haj is the biggest international assembly of Muslims that brings forth the conscious realisation that God is the sovereign creator and provider for the whole universe. This consciousness is the greatest source of strength and inspires universal fraternity and thus glorifies Islam.

May 21, 1994 *S.A. Latheef*

Prophet Mohammad, apostle of peace 20.11

Prophet Mohammad, the Apostle of Peace, was born in Mecca in 571 A. D. He heralded the last and the greatest revolution in the religious consciousness of mankind. He raised them to a dignity that was neither dreamt nor imagined earlier. It was made mandatory to seek a woman's consent for marriage and inheritance rights were also given to her. The recognition and provision of conjugal parting and the right to seek divorce was an equally revolutionary legislation. Mohammad, through precept and practice, created a social Order where the slaves could rub shoulders with their masters, distinctions of race and colour were completely abolished and "righteousness" was made the sole criterion of greatness. Obligations towards neighbours irrespective of any religious or social bias were stressed to such an extent that some feared it would lead to inheritance rights. The Apostle made it obligatory for every Muslim boy and girl to be educated and that one should seek knowledge even if one were to go to China.

Mohammad lived a life of various facets as varied as a shepherd, a trader, a hermit, an arbiter of disputes, a truce maker, a leader of men, a commander; but foremost a prophet,

a teacher of mankind and a servant of God. As a human being Mohammad remains the perfect example and model of virtues personified. The Quran is the final message of God testifying to the coming of earlier prophets and revealed books. It emphasises the miracle of creation and the mysteries of nature, exhorting readers to understand the Divine will in mundane and apocalyptic events of human history. The concepts of equality and fraternity spelt out in the Quran and sincerely practised by the Prophet's followers, paved the way for reform movements all over the world. The spirit of critical enquiry regarding the phenomenal world is consistently exhorted by the Quran. Earlier caliphs encouraged high intellectual pursuits in almost all disciplines of thought.

Islam, the last of the revealed religions, enjoins upon its followers total acceptance of and complete faith in the unity of God, Mohammad's prophethood and the life hereafter, laying great emphasis on good conduct, accountability and unity of mankind. The four cardinal obligations of a Muslim are: prayer five times a day, fasting in the month of Ramadan, charity-due, at the rate of 2.5 per cent from annual savings and pilgrimage to Mecca once in a life time for those who can afford it. Islam remains the life-force and lodestone of billions of men and women spread over the entire globe. Besides the revealed book and personal example, Mohammad has left behind thousands of companions and followers.

August 20, 1994 *Naqi Husain Jafri*

Fasting, a moral and spiritual exercise 20.12

The concept of fasting is nothing novel. Fasting in Islam is neither a means to propitiate God nor an offer to trade

an apple for an orchard. It is one of the essentials of religion almost as universal as prayer. The Holy Quran, says "You, who believe fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard (against evil)". In Islam, fasting is an institution which improves the moral and spiritual condition and it does not mean simply abstaining from food and drink of every description, but guarding oneself from every kind of evil. Fasting is a physical and moral exercise which brings passions under control, removes false sense of prestige, helps economy, greatly contributes to the preservation of health, teaches moral discipline, adds lustre to prayer and enhances faith in God, a living force.

Islam enjoins upon every adult Muslim, be he a prince or a pauper, the duty of observing fast during the month of Ramzan every year. Those suffering from illness and who are on a journey during Ramzan are permitted to substitute an equal number of days during some other part of the year. But those, who are suffering from some permanent disorder or are too old and too weak to observe fasting, are exempted altogether. However, they could feed a poor person during the month of Ramzan, if they could afford. Almighty Allah has ordained Ramzan as the best of all the months, as Quran was revealed during this month, as Quran was revealed during this month. According to empirical data, on a particular night in this month, amidst terrifying events, in the cave Hira, the Holy Prophet heard a voice conveying the command of God, "Read in the name of Lord, Who created," God's words as preserved on the tablets kept in Heaven'. Historically this month is important as Hazrath Ali, the Vicegerent of Prophet Mohammad, who was born in Kaabah was assassinated in the mosque.

Quran is the most influential book in the daily life of the Muslims and written in an exalted style, it was revealed to Prophet Mohammad. Dedication to one God and practical

instructions has made Quran unique. It is neither poetry nor prose. But it possess the ability to arouse one to the ecstasies of faith. During this month of intensive prayer, reading and understanding the intricacies of the verses of the Holy Quran assumes top priority. On the Id-day it has been enjoined on every Muslim to set apart three kilogrammes of staple food or its value as 'Fithra' and give it to the deserving before the Id prayer, for, no Muslim - man, woman or child - should bear the pangs of hunger on this auspicious day. Id-ul-Fitr is the climax and signifies the end of fasting.

March 3, 1995 *Mir Mazhar Hussain*

Fasting strengthens man spiritually 20.13

It was in the month of Ramadan, ninth in the Islamic calendar that the Holy Quran was revealed to mankind. These revelations over a period of 23 years serve as a guide to humanity to solve problems arising in the society from time to time, particularly the Muslim society. It is thus a manual for society. Acts of worship such as fasting brings us closer to God and helps us to remain conscious of Him. Fasting is the denial of the physical needs of the body for the sake of God. We are reminded of the need for fasting as it strengthens our bond with God.

Fasting reminds us of the brotherhood of man and increases mutual sympathy and keeps us away from evil. Anyone who has experienced the pangs of hunger while fasting will automatically sympathise with the poor and homeless refugees to whom hunger is a common experience. Fasting trains a man to persevere under difficulties and not give up. He often feels that he can endure more hardships than he expected.

Fasting as a spiritual exercise, as a period of penance or as a prelude to the receiving of Divine favour has always been practised by all world communities. It is imperative for the well being of man as there is a harmonious relationship between the body and the soul. Ramadan provides him with the unique power to nourish both the material and spiritual aspects of man without detriment to one another.

Luqman the wise, explains to his son, "When the stomach is full, the intellect begins to sleep. Wisdom becomes mute and the parts of the body restrain from acts of righteousness." Fasting gives rest to the digestive organs, allows impurities to be removed from the body and provides an excellent opportunity to wean away from bad habits and addiction such as smoking.

The act of compulsory charity of food to those in need on behalf of every member of the family is a unique opportunity to share the happiness of Eid with the less privileged in society. Zakatul-fitr or giving foodgrains or cash well before the congregation of Eid prayers is a system for alleviating the distress of the people at least for the time being on that day. This of course is like lighting a candle in the midst of darkness. It may not wholly dispel darkness, but if millions of candles are lighted, the gloom is bound to disappear. The Quran adds: "And in their wealth and possession, there is right of him (poor and needy) who asked and him who, for (some reason) is prevented from (asking)." May the might of Allah drive out the darkness around us, inculcate in us a sense of humility and give us consideration for the weak and needy.

February 21, 1996 *S.K. Khadri*

Redemption comes through sacrifice 20.14

Id-ul-Azha is a perennial source of inspiration for one who follows it in times of moral dilemma which dates back to almost before the migration of Prophet Mohammad. The argument of Abraham that, "Surely worship is due to Him," was so sound that the forces of evil resorted to violence and secret plotting to quell him, by throwing him into a blazing furnace.

The plot against Abraham failed and he migrated to Syria accompanied by his wife and infant son Ismail who was born when he was 86. However, the place was not a sanctuary of peace. After a few days his wife found that the water in store was exhausted and finding the pathetic condition of their child, perspiration began to bead on her forehead. She felt that within a few moments death would silence their child. With trembling legs she climbed Safa and Marva seven times in search of water but she could not find any. When she returned, she was nonplussed to find water gushing out from a place under the feet of Ismail. The tribal people in the vicinity who came in quest of water became attached to Ismail. The episode of the noble example of sacrifice goes like this. On the night of the ninth Zil-Haj, Abraham dreamt that he sacrificed his son. It is important to note that sacrifice was demanded both from Abraham and Ismail. It was a trial of the will of the father and obedience of the son.

The next day Abraham steeled himself when he readied to slaughter his son. He stood silently gazing at his handsome innocent face. Then without any betrayal of fear or filial affinity, Abraham with trembling hands placed the knife on the neck of Ismail. But there was surprise in store. Abraham saw his son standing and a sheep lying slaughtered. Thereupon

Allah said: "O Ibrahim! you have indeed materialised your dream. Surely thus do we reward the doers of good. Most surely this is a manifest trial. And we ransomed him with a "great sacrifice". And we perpetuated(praised) to him among the later generation." The adjective "great" qualifying the word "sacrifice" can be understood both in a literal and a figurative sense. In the figurative sense it refers to the "supreme sacrifice" of Imam Hussain. To commemorate his submission to the Divine Will, it has been made obligatory on Muslims, to offer sacrifice according to tradition on the day on which Haj is performed. Id-ul-Azha (Bakrid) conveys to the modern world that redemption comes through sacrifice. It teaches the younger generation to fulfill the wishes of their parents with implicit obedience.

April 18, 1997 *Mir Mazhar Hussain*

A great benefactor of humanity 20.15

Meelad-un-Nabi, the birth anniversary of Prophet Mohammad fills the minds of millions of Muslims all over the world, with deep veneration for this greatest benefactor of humanity. He was born in Mecca, on Monday, the 12th of Rabi-ul-Awwal, third lunar month of the Islamic calendar, 53 years before Hijiri and in the year 571 A.D.

It is fallacious to call Islam, Mohammadanism, a religion which is based not on the personality of the founder, but on Allah Himself who chose Prophet Mohammad as the human recipient of His message, the Holy Quran, reflecting the nature of the Absolute, as a universal guide, the central theme being the Absolute and man, the relative, he being the seal of the Prophet. As the Sufi poet, Mohammad Sabistan, says in Gulshan-e-Raz (the secret Rose garden): "The appearance

of Prophethood, was in Adam and its perfection was in the seal of Prophets."

The Holy Prophet is the prototype of human and spiritual perfection, for the Holy Quran states, "You have indeed in the messenger of Allah an excellent exempler." and in another place Quran mentions, "We sent thee not save as a mercy for the peoples." After the Quran, the most precious sources of guidance is the Hadith and the prophetic Sunna, touching upon the domestic, economic, social and political life of man.

His life was not a sermon but a living example of cardinal virtues, reflecting all the complexities of human life, drawing distinction between virtue and vice, between good and bad and to whichever side one turns, his life shines as a beacon light, guiding humanity to righteous deeds. Illustrations of his noble deeds are endless. To cite a few: he laid great stress on prayer and piety, as prayer in Quranic verse restrains man from shameful and evil deeds. For him service to man was service to God. He once asked, "Do you love your Creator? then love your fellow-beings first". He taught man, by his own conduct and practice, to seek Divine pleasure by piety and prayer, devotion and charity, love and kindness, in the service of the mankind.

About repayment of debts, he was extremely scrupulous. God never forgives even a martyr in debt. Simple in his habits and always mindful of the needs of the poor and the oppressed, he preferred existence of want and indigence to plenty and he prayed to God, "Bestow upon the dependents of Mohammad only as much provision as is necessary to sustain life". He enjoyed the supreme bliss of his soul, extinguishing himself (Fana) before Truth in order to enter life with God and subsist in Him (Baqa).

July 18, 1997 *K.S. Ahmed Pasha*

The Day of Salvation 21.1

The mystery of God cannot be easily understood but it is certain that He will forgive us as soon as we are willing to accept Him. The world is groping in the dark and people are not able to get their spiritual needs fulfilled and they do not know that God loves them. The sinful acts we commit are responsible for this blindness and for corrupting our minds. People feel it difficult to visualise God as they get deeply involved in the pleasures of life. An emigrant worker who earned and saved money was taking a diamond home to sell it and cash it. In the ship in which he was sailing, he demonstrated his prowess in jugglery and threw the diamond in the air a number of times and caught it admirably. He went on increasing the height in stages, but when the vessel suddenly listed due to high tides, he lost it in the sea. There is a "jewel" within our body but we should never juggle with it. We should try to get back to God.

Dr. Billy Graham, the world-renowned Evangelist, in a lecture said: Transgression of Moral Law is a sin. Today what one witnesses all over the world is people indulging in sins. A diseased mind cannot find God. As an embodiment of Love. God gave man the freedom of choice, between Him and the Devil, at the time of creation. Man disobeyed God and fell to temptations and chose the Devil and when he was seized of suffering, he became conscious of his guilt. God had to do something to help him. Then Jesus came into the world to solve his problems and reconcile man with God. Jesus paid for our guilt and our sins and was crucified. Jesus said "God forgive them for they know not what they do". Since Jesus suffered for our sake, God forgave man. To receive His forgiveness, we should repent and assure Him that we will give up sinful ways and change for the better. Man should approach Jesus like an innocent child, with deep faith and belief. The Bible says: "Today is the Day of Salvation

and this is the moment to be with God". He who gave His own life on the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins is the Great Comforter. Christmas is traditionally a time of prayer and a time when all men's thoughts turn towards helping those less fortunate individuals throughout the world".

December 24, 1977

Christ died for the good of humanity 21.2

It was on a Friday about 2000 years ago, that Jesus Christ was crucified at a place called Golgotha, near Jerusalem. That particular Friday is still being remembered as 'Good Friday' apparently because Jesus died on the Cross for the 'good' of humanity. This might sound mysterious and beyond one's power of reasoning as to why a "God incarnate" should die in such a humiliating manner for the good of humanity when He could do a world of good to human beings by his supernatural powers. It would be no mystery if only one tries to reason out how and why He was born on this earth.

The Bible says that when He was delivered by the 'Power of the Almighty' as a human being, the first message was 'Peace on earth and goodwill towards men,' i.e. the birth of Jesus on this earth, as a human being to a human being, heralded God's presence on the earth with 'heavenly love' towards humanity. He could have by his Godly power ordered 'love and peace' to reign on the earth, but the Almighty thought it proper, to take the form of a human being, live as one, suffer the ordeals till death and thus set an example to the world how love can help man to rise above all sins. By his life on this earth, he proved that love would not only would bring peace on the earth, but also help one to endure any amount of suffering for a righteous cause.

Jesus practised what he preached and was a living example to his followers. He said: "Love thy neighbour as thyself, offer what is due to your rulers, be satisfied with what you have or what you earn in the right way, don't revile when you are reviled," etc. He showed his love by reaching out to the needy, whoever he or she was. He never violated the laws of the land, wherever he lived. He, as well as his disciples, lived within their means and lastly, knowing the weakness of mankind and because of His love for them, He patiently bore all false accusations and torture in absolute meekness.

When a devout Christian says that he is healed or saved by the sufferings of Jesus on the Cross, he means that he has learnt to love his enemy and live in peace. Jesus lived and died on the Cross on a Good Friday only to live within the reach of every human mind.

March 24, 1989 *P. Devanbu*

The call of Christmas this year 21.3

In the middle of a lecture tour, the great English writer, G.K. Chesterton, realised he had forgotten something very important. What do you think he forgot? He forgot where he had to go. He sent a telegram to his wife. "Am in Birmingham. Where ought I to be?" His wife wired back the reply" "Home". Chesterton was, as many geniuses are, absent-minded. But forgetting basic, very important things, seems to be a common ailment that afflicts many of us.

Christmas is one of those occasions when this is evident. Most of us forget the centre of the feast. We think about food and drinks, new clothes, cards and carols, Santa Claus

and gifts. We forget the central figure of this festival - a child - the child that was born to a poor maiden in Bethleham- the child for whom there was no place in the entire town - the child that made God's love visible and tangible - the child who would later say: "I give you a new commandment. Love one another as I have loved you".

During the Christmas season we should think of that Child more than anyone else or anything else. And if a child is at the centre of this feast, we should think about children too.

On December 12 of last year (1990), there was a picture of a child on the front page of a national daily. That picture haunted me for many a day and night. The child was a girl who must have been four or five years old. What caught the attention was that there was a cut and therefore a stitch across her face - a stitch that extended from her left forehead to her right cheek.

The caption beneath the photograph said that she was one of the victims of communal riot in Hyderabad. A man had attacked the child with an axe. Think about it. An adult, a grown up man had thought it was all right to kill a child with an axe! How would this child understand what happened to her? Would her thoughts be: why would an adult of my society try to kill me? Why would he attack me so viciously? If it is because I belong to another religion, what is the meaning of religion? Has it got anything to do with God, who is supposed to be love?

There is yet another possibility. Our children, our sons and daughters, apart from being the targets, could very well be the perpetrators of such attacks! They can grow up into such monsters, such mad men and women who, in the name of religion, would attack a little child with an axe!. What

can make this possible, rather what makes this probable is a deadly disease spreading very fast in our country - a disease called communalism. Communalism is the cunning exploitation of religion for monetary or political gains - It is succumbing, yielding to religious tricksters and swallowing the poisonous idea that in order to love your religion you have to hate another.

This Christmas may call us to guard ourselves against, this disease, if we do not want our children to be either the victims or the perpetrators of violence based on religion. Hence this festival may exhort us to teach our children never to believe or be led by men who exploit religion for ugly selfish gains - money, votes or power. This Christmas may challenge us to do everything in our capacity to see that our child does not grow into a fanatic. All religions have fanatics or fundamentalists. But how are fanatics born? How does a genuine devotee become a fanatic?

In the World Conference of Religions held in Kochi in Kerala in October, a German delegate, Dr. Hans Ucko, said something which can help us understand how fanatics come into existence - He was in fact quoting the English poet, Coleridge: "He who loves Christianity more than Christ will go on to love his denomination more than Christianity. And he who loves his denomination more than Christianity will go on to love himself more than his denomination".

If you translate that to categories applicable to all religions, it would be: "He who loves his religion more than his God, will go on to love himself more than his religion". And we can be sure of this: He who loves himself more than his religion will commit any crime - but all in the name of religion.

In the Christmas story Angels sing: Glory to God on high and peace to men of good will! In a multi-religious society

like ours, one important aspect of working for peace will be to work for religious harmony - religious amity. That is the way to give glory to God.

December 25, 1991 *Fr. M.A. Joe Antony, S.I.*

Christmas, message of peace and goodwill 21.4

The Bible does not tell us about the day or month when Jesus was born. But December 25 comes at about the time of the year called the winter solstice. It is a time of devout and beautiful religious ceremonies to honour the Holy Child. Everywhere, for at least this day people will talk of peace on earth and goodwill towards men and about Prince of Peace.

The story of Christmas comes chiefly from the Gospels of St.Luke and St.Matthew in the New Testament. According to Luke, an angel appeared to shepherds outside Bethleham town 2,000 years ago. In their houses, mothers lay their children down to sleep. In the courtyards of the inn, camels lay down to rest. Here and there in homes lamps gleamed for a moment and then went out. In the heavens above appeared the same stars to rule by night. In the fields, the sheep lay down while the shepherds sat near their fires. And it was the greatest and most significant night of history. When the angel of the Lord made the glorious proclamation "Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of the great joy that will be for all the people".

"Where does God live and how do we worship Him?" Contrary to popular opinion God does not live in buildings made by human hands but in the people who have been cleansed from their sins and transformed by Him. Paul writes "You

yourselves are God's temple and God's Spirit lives in you" and "we are temple of the living God" Further, Jesus told the Samaritan woman, "God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth"

The miraculous virgin birth of Christ is the foundation stone of Christian faith. It has been a wonderful event in the history of man. Inspired prophets like Isaiah and Micah predicted in the most amazing detail the events that centred round the birth of Jesus Christ centuries before. Scriptures teach that on Christmas night, God became Man at Bethleham to redeem his creations from the Adam and Eve disease that can never be washed away by self-efforts. This great mystery in the Bible is the message over which rationalists stumble, by which humanists are offended, and by which the world is bewildered.

December 24, 1992. *N. Mukherji Victor*

A saviour is born 21.5

Prophet Isaiah prophesied the birth of the Great Child to Virgin and called Him a wonderful counsellor, mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. The Angel appeared to Joseph (who was betrothed to Mary) and said the "Child shall be named Immanuel", which means "God with us". When God is with us, we need not fear or worry about anything.

He is wonderful because His birth was quite contrary to the laws of life. He was born to a virgin in the small town of Bethleham. His speech, actions, sacrifice and love for others were wonderful. He loved His enemies also.

He is a counsellor because even at the age of 12 He advised the wisest and great learned men. He preached the Great Sermon on the Mount.

He is the mighty God because He has done many miracles. He is also called the Everlasting Father because He showed compassion to the hungry, the sick and the needy. Though He had no corn fields or fisheries, He fed five thousands and had bread and fish to spare. He is still feeding all - the rich and the poor. He turned water into wine, He walked, not on beautiful carpets or velvet rugs, but on waters and they supported Him. He is the Everlasting Father as words of grace and love come from him. His words are universally recognised.

He lived 33 years on this earth, did good to all men He met. He healed the sick; He made the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear and the dead rise. He forgave those who had persecuted Him. He saved the sinners. He chose 12 men as His disciples, but one denied Him and another betrayed Him. Though He was innocent, He was pronounced guilty. When He died, few men mourned, but the sun hid his face - unable to see the suffering of his creator. Though men did not tremble for their sins, the earth under them shook. All nature honoured Him, though men mocked at Him. The earth could not hold His body. The soil that turned red with His blood could not claim His dust. He was crucified and He died for remission of the whole world. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

May the Almighty and saviour of the world give us the real joy of Christmas and bless the world with peace and all men with goodwill.

December 25, 1992 *Rev. Dr. G.E. David*

Time to remember message of the Cross 21.6

This time of the year, Christians around the world observe one of the most significant events in the history of the world - the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Good Friday projects a striking picture of both physical and spiritual anguish Jesus experienced for the redemption of mankind. The life of Jesus on earth was a little less than 2,000 years ago. The Gospels do not tell us much about His life until He was about 30 years old. Jesus performed many miracles.

As a preacher, Jesus followed the Jewish Doctrine of the Old Testament but carried the message of love and humility much farther, making them apply to all men and not only to the Jews.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus was involved in conflict with the religious authorities, mainly because of His scathing criticism of their manmade traditions which diverted men from the real purpose of God's law. That He spoke the truth was intolerable to all forms of authority, especially ecclesiastical. The High Priest and the elders conspired to kill Him.

There was the farce of the judicial proceedings against Jesus, intended to give His execution a show of legality. He was put through a trial which appears to have broken the appropriate legal rules. When the witnesses failed to produce sufficient evidence to condemn Jesus, He was forced to make what His judges regarded as the blasphemous statement that He was the Messiah. The High Priest and the elders were not entitled to impose the death sentence. So they handed Him over to the Roman Governor, as a political rebel against Rome. Although the Governor was privately convinced of Jesus' innocence, he allowed Him to be put to death by the Roman punishment of crucifixion.

Jesus accepted it though He knew what was involved in scourging and execution at the hands of the Romans. The Romans used a flagellum, a whip of leather thongs, to which small pieces of metal or bone were tied. People sometimes died under the scourge. The back of Jesus was laid open by the Roman scourge. His head was covered with a crown of thorns. His hands were nailed to the Cross.

When Jesus went willingly to death, He was offering His life for mankind. His was the sacrifice that God had appointed and ordained to be the one and only sacrifice for sin. The Cross, as the supreme symbol of suffering, reveals two basic facts: the depth of man's depravity and the immensity of God's love.

April 9, 1993. *A. Yeshuratnam*

The revelation of Divine mystery 21.7

Reading a mystery novel or watching a mystery serial on television excites us a great deal. As the story moves on and the mystery is slowly unravelled, we eagerly want to know what the end is. We are even tempted to turn to the last few pages to know how the story is going to end. God has shared a significant mystery with His people. It is the mystery of Christ. Christmas is all about that unique mystery. In the biblical Greek, mystery signifies a revealed secret which is divine. The apostle Paul describes that the mystery of Christ is "through the Gospel, the gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and shares together in the promise in Christ Jesus".

We cannot share the mystery of Christ by ourselves. We are weak and prone to failure. We need to derive strength from God to do His work in His way. We must share the

mystery of Christ with love. Though the mystery is an objective fact, to make it felt in our midst, we must allow the Spirit of God to make us rooted in love, so that we will become the channels of His blessings. Let our prayer be "God, from Your glorious riches, strengthen us with power through Your Spirit in our inner being, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts. Help fill us to the measure of all Your fullness".

Today, millions of people, all over the world, are gripped with fear, shackled by racial, tribal and castle barriers, and cry for justice and dignity. In such a situation, God, by His amazing grace has revealed to you and me, the mystery of Christ with the purpose that people everywhere will be made known that when they respond to the Gospel, they can approach Him with freedom and confidence through Christ, and enter a new, privileged and blessed life in Christ.

December 25, 1993 *Rev. Francis Sunderaraj*

The best place to be in, is the place of duty 21.8

People, fettered and bound, were incapable of coming to God, so He, in love and mercy, descended to earth to save mankind. The creature could not come up to the Creator, so the latter came down to redeem His creations from Adam and Eve days. But He did not arrive just to be identified with mankind. He also came for a purpose: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself", "Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged out sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high".

Imagine the night of Jesus birth as the shepherds were abiding in the fields near Bethleham 2,000 years ago. It was on this night of Jesus birth that Justice dealt a resounding

blow to man's mortal enemy Peace is tied to the One who was born that night.

Shepherds were not highly rated in Palestine in those days. In fact, they were a despised class. The nature of their occupation made it impossible for them to meet the requirements of the religious regulations and laws. But God selected a small group of shepherds in rough robes outside the town of Bethleham as they sat near their little fires, mostly, preparing their evening meal and exchanging stories from their days work or form journeys of the past. St. Luke says angel Gabriel suddenly appeared by them and uttered. "There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And the angel of the Lord came.

Notice that it was while these shepherds were at their common, humble work that they had this wonderful vision. The best place to have the angels come to us is always at our post of duty, no matter how lowly it is.

The Bible says that God became Man at Bethleham that night. We never know that we lose by being out of our place of duty. Celestial visions do not come to those who despite God's allotments in life. The angel honoured poverty and faithfulness when he came to the shepherds rather than to the door of some lordly place, to proclaim his glorious tidings. The best place to be in is always the place of duty.

December 27, 1993. *N. Mukherji Victor*

Lord Jesus is with the poor 21.9

Will God visit us? Yes, He will, provided we show our deep faith in His powers. He may not appear in flesh and

blood but He will definitely make us feel His presence in some form.

An aged cobbler in a small town used to pray during Christmas month that he should see the face of Lord Jesus. "Will you be with me this Christmas day," was his request for years. Once on December 23, Jesus in his dream said He would visit him on Christmas day. "Be prepared" the Lord told him. The cobbler was excited and kept his house decorated, brought cakes and even made a pair of shoes for the Master. On Christmas day, he was anxiously awaiting the Lord.

There was a gentle tap as he had kept his door closed since it was cold. When he opened, he saw a sweeper doing his duty, Shivering and barelegged. There was bleeding in one foot. Taking pity on him, the cobbler brought him inside, offered him eatables, and handed him over the new pair of shoes. The poor man was overwhelmed and left, profusely thanking him.

In the afternoon, there was another knock at the door. This time, it was an old woman who was starving for long and who was in urgent need of food. The cobbler served her with cakes and hot liquid, and sent her, presenting a woolen coat and cap to cover her head. In the evening, he heard the cry of a girl. She was in tears. The cobbler took the child inside his house, gave her bread and other dish. She informed him that she had lost her way. He traced her house and saw her safe and happy with her parents.

When the good Samaritan came back to his home, it was dark. He switched on the lights and the Christmas tree. His mind was however sad as Jesus did not pay the promised visit. As he went to bed, he knelt and prayed, expressing his grief and slept with a heavy heart. He saw Jesus in the dream and enquired why He did not keep His word. With

a smiling face, the Lord replied: "I visited you thrice, did you not recognise me". "When and how" he wondered. "The sweeper to whom you offered the pair of shoes, the old woman whom you served food and gave the coat and the girl whom you helped to trace her home are all Me". Getting from his bed, the cobbler was extremely happy that it was Jesus whom he had helped on a Christmas day and not anyone else.

December 28, 1993 *John C. Sanandam*

Salvation through suffering 21.10

On Good Friday, Christians the world over meditate on a suffering God. This is a stumbling block to many for they cannot conceive of a God who like human beings can suffer. By definition, God is impersonal and transcendent and, therefore, beyond the pale of human emotions and categories. They believe that a suffering God is too anthropomorphic to do justice to the divinity of God. Hence, many do not even approve of incarnations. Is it not ridiculous to subject God to all the infirmities that humanity is heir to? Will it not be preposterous to let God participate in a life which many look upon as nothing if not a bagful of misery and suffering and therefore better to be rid of. Our ideal world is always one where there is no suffering or pain!

But a closer scrutiny would show us that a world devoid of suffering cannot indeed be the best of all possible worlds. For it is given to mankind to distinguish the genuine from the fake, the true from the false, the original from the duplicate, the real from the bogus, only through the test of suffering. A mother's love is glorified not because she is the source of all good things, but mainly because it's a mother who is prepared to undergo all kinds of sufferings and pain for

the welfare of her child. Suffering also is the test of true friendship. How else would any one know who his true friends are, except through the test of sufferings?

No wonder when God wanted to reveal His amazing love for mankind He chose the way of suffering. This is no simplistic anthropomorphic understanding of God, for if it was left to the imagination of a human intellect, most probably the outcome would have been a superhuman image of God and not an image of a suffering servant as that would be more in tune with the human concept of God.

Lord Jesus goes the whole hog, as it were, taking upon himself the Karma of the world and atones for it by subjecting himself to suffering and pain; leading to death, reward of sin. Where God's justice and love meet, we see the cross. A theologian calls it the "Costly Grace of God". Christianity does not offer its followers salvation from suffering, but salvation through suffering. This is its paradox and its glory. For God Himself, through His sufferings bequeathed blessings and salvation to all mankind. The devout, therefore, do not look upon suffering as something to be loathed but a means of sharing God's grace and blessings.

April 1, 1994. *Rev. C.V. Theodore*

A message of goodwill and hope 21.11

Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came to the world to save mankind from sin. He came to heal humanity, to free us from bad habits, conflicts, wars, to cure us of greed, lust, pride, jealousy, suspicion and hatred, and to give us love and happiness. For this He had to suffer death on the Cross. But He rose again triumphantly to give us a new life and to show us that death is not the

final word in history. He came to the world in order to teach us the path of love and forgiveness. He is the supreme teacher of love and brotherhood.

Are we able to bring the good news of Christ to people living in today's world? The Angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, Goodwill toward men". It is significant that Christmas concerns the whole of mankind and it demands the courageous and united action of all men of goodwill. God was pleased to give His son for the salvation and comfort of all the world. It is for our happiness that God became human. It is for our fellowship and mutual company that Jesus gave all of himself and mutual company to meet our needs, to celebrate with him and all people in the land of the living.

The essential thing about Christmas is not only what took place in Bethleham two thousand years ago, but it is rather the fact that Christ is born and the love of God is revealed in this world today and on every day of the year. God has revealed Himself to His creation. He has come to us incarnate to show us the way.

Man today is looking for light, guidance and spiritual power. The whole world is seeking ways of making human personality morally sound and is in search of the Truth which is capable of regenerating man. How are we to find peace of heart and harmony with the universe? Christ has something to say on all our problems and He still has the power in the hearts of men. Jesus Christ is not a figure of the past. He is a living influence in the world today.

The message of Christmas is not only a message of peace but also of hope. We have to love in this world with hope and also look beyond the grave. It gives the message of love also and is the manifestation of God's gifts of His people.

God has demonstrated His personal concern and involvement in every area of human life, work and thought. The life of Jesus Christ is an example of His love for all mankind.

If peace and goodwill have to prevail in this world, we have to forget our differences and come forward with a love that embraces the whole mankind. We have to put an end to hatred and violence.

December 25,1995 *E.J. John*

The Cross, a sign of forgiveness 21.12

Good Friday observes the death of Christ on the Cross just before Easter Sunday. On this day as a symbol of the stripping of Jesus' garments before crucifixion, all the decorations from the main altar in churches are removed. At least for a few hours most of the churches all over the world conduct special mourning services meditating on the supreme love of God in His heart to cause Him to give His begotten son to endure such a cruel death to save mankind.

The Cross is the sign, symbol and trade mark of every Christian. It was Constantine - the first Emperor to become a Christian - who gave added impetus to the use of the Cross symbol. At the time of baptism the pastor puts the sign of the Cross on the forehead. This sign is used by Bishops while anointing the candidate for confirmation. When a Christian dies, a Cross is placed on his tomb. So from birth to burial the symbol of every Christian is the Cross.

To the writers of the New Testament forgiveness for sin is the heart of the Cross and the point of clearest revelation about the character of God. The fact of the matter is that it involves a reversal of human expectations and God's

demonstration of His power to redeem man from sin. St.Paul says, "But far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ". This new dimension of the Cross offers hope to reach down to conquer every day evils as well as eternal ones.

The hatred with which Jesus was put to death on the Cross continues to extend its tint in the world even today. Ironically, Jesus on the Cross uttered no cry of pain, no world of execration upon those who were causing Him such suffering, but calmly prayed for His brutal, pitiless murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do". The pleading was first for the ignorant heathen soldiers who were acting as executioners; but it was not for them alone. It certainly widened out, and took in all who had been concerned in the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus.

This word of Jesus is a great lesson on forgiveness. He prayed for His murderers. It is easier said than done for one to make statements about all good things on earth. But if that spirit is not rooted in real life and struggles of the people, it means nothing.

There are some fragrant trees which bathe in perfume the axe gashes them. So should it be with the present day mankind. Instead of resentment and injury, one should manifest only tender love to those who harm them.

April 5, 1996. *N. Mukherji Victor*

Christmas, a festival of joy and peace 21.13

Christmas, the feast commemorating the birth of Christ is a festival of great joy, peace and love. The good tidings, the gospel of peace has been brought to us by no less a person

than the Son of God Himself. This great and mighty act of God, the incarnation, which is celebrated on Christmas day, is a proof of His love for man and His mercy for us; thus it is the feast of God's mercy and love.

On the Christmas day we should recall to our minds the infinite love of God in sending His son to the Earth to be born of the Virgin Mary in a stable in Bethleham so that men could spend their eternity in the mansions of heaven. We should show our gratitude and appreciation by resolving to love as children of God are expected to live.

There is a spiritual depth in the mystery of the birth of Jesus, the Emmanuel, who is God-with-us. The immensity of this truth should in no way be drowned in all the mirth and joy. We should recall this in prayer and meditation.

There is one aspect of Christmas which cannot fail to touch us for it is the most eloquent message surrounding birth of Jesus. It is none other than the greetings of peace delivered by the angels who announced the birth of Jesus. Our failures and those of the society around us give us pain and disappointment. Only Jesus Christ can give us the gift of peace and tranquillity of mind and heart.

Man desires peace in his own terms. This generally establishes among the peace partners a relationship of the victor and the vanquished, or the powerful and the powerless. This is the very opposite of the conditions needed for lasting peace. Peace can only be among equals. Those who are less favoured might make an effort, generally leading to fight for one's rights and forcing others to shed their power and privilege. Peace obtained by such process is bound to be forced and fragile.

If today the situation may seem to be desperate with bonfires literally sending peace in smoke, is it not because we do not stop to consider the interests of others as important as our own? This is the challenge Christmas throws up. Are we capable of following the ways of God in securing peace and harmony or shall we remain hard-headed and hard-hearted and bury our chances of peace once and for all?

The feast of Christmas must infuse new hope in our hearts and new strength to work for peace. The message of Christmas is that God is very much a part of our peace building process.

December 25, 1996 *John Verghese*

God became man to redeem humanity 21.14

From time to time, God sent His prophets as messengers, but mankind did not care to listen to them. But, God did not want to destroy mankind as in the days of Noah by flood. "God loved the world so much that he gave His only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost but have eternal life." (John: 3.16) He sent his Son not to judge the guilty, but to save the world through him. In other words, the Son of God became the son of man to redeem mankind. Crucifixion preceded Easter. Christ's crucifixion took place in public, open for all the world to see. But why did this happen?

The light had come into the world but those who were doing evil did not want light, but darkness. They could not bear the light. It was not the will of man, but the will of God. Centuries before the birth of Christ, it was ordained

that Jesus Christ would take birth in this world, he would suffer such a death and on the third day, he would ultimately win over death by resurrection. It was even foretold by Christ himself.

Being the will of God nothing could stall Pilate the then Roman Governor from pronouncing the decree to crucify Jesus on a cross at Calvary counting him among criminals. The spectacle of Cross reveals the vast difference between a God who proves Himself through power and one who proves Himself through love. The cross on which Christ was put to death by evil forces on a Friday is the supreme example of righteousness. This cross can never belong to a person who will not show it supreme respect. Hence the day is called Good Friday - good from the point of view of mankind. Crucifixion invites man to complete the cycle of human failure and redemption. Man is created by God. Without exception he moves away from righteousness. Christ invites him to the cross to return to fellowship with God, the Father, for everlasting life.

Christ gave up his life on the cross. The mission of Christ would have been incomplete without resurrection. As foretold, on the third morning his tomb was empty. "He is risen". The angels who stood guard asked those who visited the tomb early on Sunday morning, "Why are you looking for a living person among the dead? He is not here. He is risen". (Luke: 24:5) Risen indeed and appeared to his disciples and followers a number of times. He blessed them and gave them the mission to be His true witnesses in this world. Promising His presence with them until the end of the world, Jesus ascended to heaven, a mission accomplished! Christ's resurrection is a physical event for the reversal of sin and death. If it happened once, it can happen again.

March 28, 1997 *John Verghese*

Harbinger of lasting peace 21.15

Christmas is a festival where people of all faiths join the celebration. The gospel writer, Luke, portrays the story of Jesus' birth in seven short verses. It is a jewel of economical story telling. But then he devotes twice as much space to what seems a picturesque addition to the story-the angels' visit to the shepherds. The first century was a time of weariness and despair. The civilisations of the world had played themselves out one after another. The Roman Empire was tottering on the brink of self-destruction. It was a grim situation of moral deterioration, racial tension and burdensome taxation.

To this darkened, sin-weary world came the announcement of the birth of God's long-awaited Son. For almost 400 years the voice of prophecy had been stilled. Now at last, God broke that silence and spoke to some poor shepherds who were socially outcast and economically poor.

When the angels appeared in the brilliance of the noon day sun, the shepherds were terrified. But they told them: "Do not be afraid". It is striking that the human emotion that was first experienced by the visit of the messenger was fear. Men were afraid of many things then as they are today. People were frightened of the might and power of Rome. By far, the most dominant mood is that of fear. A little child in kindergarten is as frightened as an adult business man is. There is a fear neurosis that grips the heart of man. And it is the fear of the future.

Yet, the first word to those frightened men on that first Christmas was: "Do not be afraid". There cannot be any greater news than that for mankind today. And the reason for this being: "Today, in David's city is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord".

The presence of a Saviour and a Deliverer would take away their fears. In a day when men's hearts are failing because of fear, it is the presence of Jesus, God's Son, that can deliver them from the fears.

Further, the Angels went on to announce: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace". When Christ was born some form of peace did prevail. Yet one writer of the first century put it this way: "While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace of the heart". What the world needs so desperately is peace. This Christmas, many will seek a temporary reprieve from the troubled world. But lasting peace can come only when the Prince of Peace is invited into our lives, homes and our troubled world.

December 25, 1997 — *Rev. Michael Peppin*

Significance of Baisakhi 22.1

Baisakhi, the Punjabi new year day, corresponds to the Tamil new year day. It has always been celebrated with gusto and gaiety. On this day in 1699, Guru Nanak's nine successors did something that was later to change the course of Indian history.

A contemporary of Aurangazeb Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) clashed with the emperor and their differences were never resolved. The days of the sagacious and liberal policy of religious tolerance by Akbar came to an end. During the reign of Jehangir and Shah Jahan the State policy gradually came under the sway of the clergy.

Those who did not profess or readily adopt the state religion were subjected to discrimination and oppressive laws. Special taxes were imposed, their educational institutes were ordered to be closed and their places of worship demolished. The fundamental human right of freedom to worship was denied and by the early 1670s, the atmosphere had become stifling. Guru Teg Bahadur, Nanak the ninth, decided to take up the people's cause. Aurangazeb, instead of reasoning and changing his policy, had him publicly executed in 1675 (Gurdwara Sis Ganj in Delhi's Chandni Chowk marks the hallowed spot). Guru Gobind Singh who was then only nine years old resolved to carry on the struggle. In his autobiography he says he was born to uphold righteousness and to destroy the wicked - a task which required the dual role of a saint and soldier. The organisation through which he was to accomplish this work must therefore comprise people possessing the highest degree of morality (as saints) and fearlessness of death (as soldiers). The problem was where and how to find such selfless, dedicated people.

Came the Baisakhi of 1699! People in large numbers were invited to assemble at Anandpur. Guru Gobind Singh made a dramatic appearance with a sword in hand. To everyone's amazement, instead of the expected religious discourse, he made a simple demand. Was there anyone willing to lay down his life for the sake of Dharma? The meeting was stunned into silence. Heads bent low. But then rose a person, Bhai Daya Ram, a Khatri of Lahore, who offered himself in the cause. The Guru led him to a nearby tent and soon was back on the stage with a blood-dripping sword to make another call. Now the audience had no doubt what the Guru meant to do with the volunteers. Some even started slipping away. Next, a person by the name of Bhai Dharm Chand, a Jat of Hastinapur responded. He too was taken to the same tent and the Guru again returned to the stage. He made three more calls which were responded to by Bhai Mukham Chand, a washerman of Dwarka; Bhai Sahib Chand, a barber of Bidar and Bhai Himmat Rai, a water carrier of Puri.

A little later, Guru Gobind Singh brought forth all the five volunteers alive, dressed in martial attire and fully armed. He called them Panj Pyare (the five beloved). He gave them the baptism of steel and changed their names to end in Singh (lion). Daya Ram became Daya Singh and Dharm Chand became Dharm Singh and so on. These five constituted the nucleus of the great Khalsa organisation which Guru Gobind Singh created for the purpose of establishing righteousness and ending oppression. About 20,000 people followed the example and accepted the baptism of steel that day and later more people joined the new order.

It was with this Khalsa that Guru Gobind Singh challenged the oppression of the mighty Moghuls. It is a historical fact that time and again the handful of Khalsa fighters got the better of Moghul forces. After Guru Gobind Singh's death in 1708, the Khalsa carried on the struggle. The 18th century

was marked by the most devastating raid of Nadir Shah and the repeated raids of Ahmed Shah Abdali. The Khalsa would accost the raiders while they passed through the Punjab. They would relieve them of much of their loot and have the maximum number of women captives released.

November 11, 1992

Characteristics of a true devotee 22.2

To reach the kingdom of God, a devotee should have his life moulded into a precious coin. For that a mint is to be found. The requirements for the mint are patience, chastity and continence, spiritual knowledge, understanding, fear of God, austerities and love, "Let charity by the furnace and patience be the goldsmith; proper understanding, the anvil and spiritual knowledge, the hammer". Let fear of God be the bellows, austerities the fire and love the crucible. In this should be poured the human life and allowed to cool. The result will be product - gold coin of "Nam" (name Divine).

With this signet, a devotee will be admitted into the holy congregation and accepted in the sacred court of the Lord. Those who win the glance of God through His kindness will take to this path of "Nam". On them, greater amount of grace will be showered. They will rest eternally in the consummate Bliss and Beatitude. These were the words of Guru Nanak in his "Japji" (prayers) for God-realisation. This great reformer's verses are embedded in the "Granth Sahib", the Sikh scripture, to which "Japji" is a prelude, emphasising oneness of God and the cult of "Nam" recitation.

In a lecture on Guru Nanak's birth anniversary, Sri Surjit Singh Sahney referred to the greater master's advice about renunciation. Instead of seeking seclusion, a devotee should

wear "contentment" as his ear-rings, modesty and humility as his bowl and wallet, meditation as the "ash" "Let remembrance of death be your gown. Let faith tempered with a disciplined conduct be your resting staff. Such an exalted soul will belong to the entire humanity, not confining himself to obscurity".

While Guru Nanak lays down the duty of offering prayers with devotion and the pursuit of enlightenment and liberation, he does not shrink from calling openly an individual to wage a battle for justice when the need arises. Kabir, many of whose pronouncements are close to the Guru's in spirit, says "The true hero is one who in defence of the helpless may be hacked limb by limb but does not flee the field". Guru Nanak's stress on religion is basically ethical. It is the pursuit of that state which transcends immoral thoughts and actions.

November 11, 1992

Guru Gobind Singh purified politics 22.3

Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhism, was the first among the Hindus to raise his voice against the evil forces prevailing at that time. His simple message was "work, worship and share your food with others". The light lit by him was kept shining by his successors till Guru Gobind Singh who declared before his departure for heavenly abode that henceforth the Holy granth would be the spiritual guide of the Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh made Khalsa a full-fledged nation and taught them to perform the noble duty of defending the motherland and fighting tyranny.

Arousing the dormant energies of a vanquished people at a time when political turmoil, oppression and persecution reigned supreme, he resorted to the use of arms when all other means failed. He infused a new spirit of courage and

bravery among his countrymen. He stood for secularism and democratic principles and pleaded for man's rights and non-interference in personal life. Although death snatched him when he was 42, he left his footprints for the posterity to follow.

In a lecture, Sri Surjit Singh Sahney said: "The plight of his followers as well as the Hindus in general, the prevailing corruption and his own personal resentment at his father's persecution made him decide to evolve a new order with emphasis on sacrificing one's life for the cause of Dharma (Righteousness)". He sought to make nationalism the religion. He relied on the Will of God and on the strength of his sword. The Guru integrated his Sikhs into one homogeneous fraternity. All were to be treated as equals. A tremendous change occurred in the whole tone of national character by his call. Even those who were considered as drags of humanity were transformed.

The torch lit by Nanak and kept alive by his successors eventually came to the hands of the 10th (Nanak) Guru, Gobind Singh who gave it to the Khalsa (Sikh Commonwealth) which he created. Thus the Khalsa arose (way of life). With its creation, a new casteless society came into being. He united politics with religion and thus purified the former.

He once addressed Sikhs thus: Blessed is he who repeats God's name with his mouth and meditates war in his heart.

December 31, 1992

Noble mission of Guru Gobind Singh 22.4

The torch which was lit by Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion, has been kept alive by his successors in whom

the spirit of that great luminosity pervaded. It eventually came into the hands of the tenth leader, Guru Gobind Singh, who instead of entrusting it to an individual, as had been the practice hitherto, gave it over to his Khalsa, Sikh commonwealth, created by him to carry on the noble mission. He prescribed a particular form for his Khalsa panth so that Sikhs could be easily recognised.

Guru Gobind Singh, last among the Gurus (1666-1708 AD) initiated the baptism ceremony in 1699, thus giving a distinctive identity to its followers. The first five baptised Sikhs were named 'Panj Pyare' (five beloved ones) who, in turn, baptised the guru on his request, an event hitherto unknown in the history of mankind. Before passing away, he ordained that 'Guru Granth Sahib', Sikh holy scripture, be the ultimate spiritual authority for the Sikhs and 'Khalsa Panth', the temporal authority.

Guru Gobind Singh sought to make nationalism, the people's religion. He advocated even the use of arms to root out oppression. He stood for the basic human rights without any interference from the State. He relied on the will of God. The Guru abolished the institutions of 'Masands' which had become a fertile cause of disruption. Guru Govind had therefore to give the people something positive to replace what he had destroyed. The Chieftains were fighting among themselves without reasons. The so-called low caste members were hated. Women had no rights in society. The Sikhs shirked the call for duty.

Sri Surjit Singh Sahney, in a lecture, explained how under these circumstances Guru Gobind Singh decided to create the khalsa. A Sikh believed in one God and in the teachings of the ten Gurus enshrined in the Granth Sahib. Additionally, he or she must take baptism (Amrit). Gobind Singh integrated Sikhs into one homogeneous fraternity. All were to be treated as equals. In every heart now throbbed

a new longing to be free. Inaction, sloth and slavish disposition were flung away. A tremendous change was thus effected in the national character.

April 13, 1993

Universal brotherhood, Nanak's creed 22.5

"Remembrance of God and service to humanity are the two essential concomitants of spiritual life. My creed is the loving devotion to God. Its objective is the union of the individual soul with the Divine soul, the all-pervading reality. The best course for an aspirant is to follow the path shown by the spiritual guide (Guru), gain knowledge of his own inner Self and meditate on God's name. Through deep devotion to the words of the preceptor, one will reach a stage where one can perceive the presence of the Almighty in every thing and feels His presence within oneself. That is how man becomes conscious of the soul with God".

These were the statements made by Guru Nanak during his discussion with a group of saintly men, contained in his poetical composition called "Siddha Gosht" with 73 stanzas. "I have no power except the name of the Lord," he told the yogis. When through the inspired utterances of the teacher, the Lord dwells in the heart of a devotee, he overcomes all the attractions of the world. In this way, despite his engagement in worldly affairs, he leads a pure life and remains untouched by the sins of the world even as a lotus retains no water or dirt on its leaf. Pure life coupled with devotion enables one to cross the ocean of existence (samsara) and the cycle of transmigration comes to an end.

On the occasion of Guru Nanak's birthday, Sri Surjit Singh Sahney, in a lecture, said the great social reformer

had explained that when a devotee realised that the spirit was eternal, imperishable and everlasting and that, only the body died, he ceased to have any fear of death. Guru Nanak's whole life was based on the ideal combination of ethical, spiritual and professional conduct. Whatever his vocation, he performed his duties diligently and honestly and yet there was an undercurrent of deep devotion to God. This is exactly what he taught his disciples which, in course of time, became the main characteristic feature of the new fraternity. He laid emphasis on the simplicity of life, the virtue of humility and the disposition of serving the poor. The Guru's birth in 1969 A.D. marked a turning point in medieval history.

November 29, 1993

Believe in Guru Nanak, Sikhs told 22.6

The plight of the people particularly the Sikhs, the religious strifes brought about by the persecution of the then rulers, ignorance and superstition among them and similar circumstances, all around the 16th century made a great man decide to evolve a new order with the sole object of making them realise the necessity of sacrificing their lives for the cause of 'Dharma' (Righteousness). This leader was Guru Gobind Singh, (the 10th and last among the Sikh gurus) whose efforts resulted in the creation of the Khalsa Panth. (Life of purity).

Guru Gobind Singh initiated the Sikh baptism ceremony, giving a distinctive identity to his followers. The five Sikhs baptised first were named "Panj Pyare", who in turn baptised the Guru on his request - an event hitherto unknown in the history of mankind.

Shortly before his passing away, he ordained that Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy scripture would be the ultimate

spiritual authority for the Sikhs. The temporal authority would rest in the Khalsa (the Sikh commonwealth). The Granth contains the sacred compositions in the form of short pieces of poetry, of the Gurus of the Sikh faith upto the time of Guru Arjun (the fifth). Those composed by the 9th Guru (Teg Bahadur) were added by the command of the tenth, Gobind Singh, a little after 1680 A.D.

Guru Gobind Singh came into the world with a special mission. He was sent by the Lord to perform certain duties for the emancipation of mankind. it is believed that the Guru composed his famous classic "Vichittar Natak" when he was about to announce the creation of Khalsa. I was born in this world to help good to flourish and to uproot all tyrants" he said. He did not arrogate to himself the role of the Lord. "I am but the slave of the Lord and have come to see the spectacle of the world".

Sri Surjit Singh Sahney in a lecture said, at the Guru's instance Sikhs collected at Anandpur and in a surprise move Gobind Singh beheaded five among the masses who volunteered to get sacrificed. But he later brought them alive at which the whole congregation shouted loudly with one voice "Sat Sri Akal" (Victory to God).

Addressing them, he asked them to embrace one creed and follow one path, obliterating all differences of religion. "Believe in Guru Nanak and his successors". The Sikhs fulfilled his aspirations. A new path - of valour, devotion and sacrifice was shown to them.

The Guru aimed at creating a compact brotherhood of faith. His Sikhism in essence remained the same as ordained by Guru Nanak but the institution of Guru cult was given a new form. He made any five Sikhs competent to represent

the Khalsa. The torch lit by Guru Nanak was handed over by the last Guru (Gobind Singh) to the Khalsa instead to an individual.

April 13, 1994

Guru Nanak's message relevant forever 22.7

'One who created the world is the Lord of all. Fortunate are those hearts which remain attached to God's service. Those who adhere to Truth and serve Him will obtain their reward. Those who know what constitutes Divine knowledge are the learned.'

These ideas, expressed in a hymn came from a precious child while he was studying in school. Dumbstruck by this praise of the Lord, by a six-year-old pupil, the teacher bowed before him, and proclaimed him, his master. The boy stopped going to school and in later years became an illustrious spiritual leader. He was Guru Nanak.

Religious instruction was imparted to the boy through a Muslim scholar. Quick to grasp and complete his duty, the 'student' told the master, "God is the Father of all and we are his children. We should love one another and live like a family." The 'teacher' showed his reverence to his pupil, acknowledging him as his guide. Nanak was born in Talwandi (about 60 km from Lahore) in 1469 A.D.

In accordance with family tradition, his father wanted to perform the sacred thread investiture ceremony for Nanak. His hymn at that time is a famed one. "Make compassion cotton; contentment yarn; give it chastity's twist and knot such is the true thread of the self; such thread will neither

snap nor be spoiled, will neither burn nor be lost; blessed are those who wear it". Guru Nanak revolted against practices of Hindus and Muslims which were fundamentalistic and ritualistic. He was so God-intoxicated that for hours he would sit in meditation alone. He undertook journeys, including to Mecca, Baghdad and Tibet, to spread the message of universal love, for over 17 years.

He stood for a casteless and classless society in which no one will be superior to another and where no one, through greed or selfishness will encroach upon the rights of others and where all persons will live like members of one family, helping one another and supplying the requirements of the less-fortunate , thus making Nanak one of the world's early socialists. he was followed by nine Gurus in completing his mission. Guru Gobind Singh made the 'Guru Granth Sahib' the living 'Guru' to propagate the Guru's teachings, in 1708.

"Earn a living by hard labour; Remember the Lord and share your earnings with the needy and those requiring your help." These are the main principles enunciated by Guru Nanak whose teachings are of great relevance for ever.

November 17, 1994 *Manindar Singh*

Tolerance essential for freedom 22.8

In a short period of his life, one of the greatest spiritual leaders of India fought for human freedom, stood for secularism and pleaded for man's rights and non-interference in one's personal affairs. This last apostle of the Sikhs did not live to see his own ends accomplished but effectually roused the dormant energies of a vanquished people to the teachings of Guru Nanak.

The teachings of this mighty personality can open the eyes of our troubled world to the art of creating unity in diversity, and establishing peace through tolerance and building a human society based on truth and justice. He was the tenth and last of the Sikh gurus, Guru Gobind Singh (1966-1708 AD) who, before passing away ordained that the "Granth Sahib", the Sikh holy scripture would be the ultimate spiritual authority, while the temporal authority would rest in "Khalsa Panth", the Sikh commonwealth. The doctrine of Guru Nanak that truth is greater than all and pilgrimages, that love of God is better than all religious rites and ceremonies, enabled Guru Gobind Singh, to pave a new path. It was form Nanak that he learnt to rise against tyranny and injustice. Gobind's work was the natural result of the process of evolution that had been going on, ever since the inception of Sikh brotherhood.

The seed that blossomed in the time of Guru Gobind Singh was sown by Nanak and watered by his successors. the sword which carved out the Khalsa's way to glory was undoubtedly forged by Gobind Singh, but the steel had been provided by Nanak who had obtained it by "smelting the Hindu ore and burning out the dross of indifference and superstition of the masses and the hypocrisy of the then priest". Whereas Nanak propagated goodness, Gobind Singh condemned evil. One preached the love of one's neighbour, the other, the punishment of transgressors. Nanak's God loved his saints, Gobind's destroyed his enemies.

In a lecture, Sri Surjit Singh Sahney said the Guru created the Khalsa, transferring sovereignty to the poor and needy of our society. In his last words, he asked he people that whenever they needed his guidance and counsel, they should decide their line of action in the light of the teachings of the 10 masters embodied in the Holy Granth Sahib. The "Granth" thus became the beacon light and the "Guru". Gobind Singh initiated Sikh baptism ceremony in 1699 AD, thus giving

a distinctive identity to the Sikhs. He enjoined upon his followers that "when an affair is past every other remedy, it is right indeed, to unsheath the sword". He propagated the existence of only one God. Guru Gobind came into this world with a special mission to emancipate mankind. He evolved a new order to make people realise the need to sacrifice their lives for the cause of "Righteousness" (Dharma). He remains as the ideal of all Indians.

January 7, 1995

A spiritual and temporal Prophet 22.9

Sikhs all over the world are celebrating the quatercentenary birth anniversary of the sixth Guru, Har Gobind. He was the son of the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev who was the builder of Hari Mandir (Golden temple), compiler of Guru Grantha Sahib and first martyr in Sikh history. Guru Har Gobind was born in 1695 at Vadali, a village near Amritsar. He was from the beginning given education and military training under the guidance of Bhai Buddha, a devoted Sikh who also performed the ceremony of coronation of the earlier four Gurus from Guru Angand to Guru Arjan Dev.

Hardly had Har Gobind attained the age of 11 years when Guru Arjan Dev was mercilessly tortured to death at Lahore. This instilled a new spirit and life into the people and they resolved to exert and sacrifice themselves for the sake of righteousness. They were determined to resist and evict evil from the country.

When Guru Har Gobind sat on the spiritual throne of Guru Nanak, he was presented with the ribbon of renunciation that Nanak had worn and had been presented to successive Gurus at the time of their attaining Guruship by Bhai Buddha. But Guru Har Gobind chose to wear two swords instead.

The swords which the Master wore were emblems of spiritual and temporal authority - Piri and Miri, a combination of Bhakti and Shakti. The master then told all his men to carry arms and swords.

The Saint-soldiers of Guru Har Gobind were of exalted spirits. A man of this supreme nature is fearless and does not frighten others. They were seasoned heroes and warriors who would wield the sword as a shield to protect the weak and uphold righteousness. The Guru was called Saccha Badshah (the true king) as was the custom since Guru Nanak's days; his audience hall was known as Darbar and his accession to Guruship, the coming to throne. He built a place for congregation of his Sikhs called the Akal Takht (throne of immortality) opposite the Golden temple where besides spiritual matters, secular affairs affecting the community were also discussed. He built a small fortification also, called Loh Garh (the fort of iron).

No wonder, in the eyes of the rulers, this was a departure from old pacifism. So it looked strange also in the eyes of the detractors of Sikhism. Secular activity had always been an integral part of the Sikh faith, and there is no essential difference in the outlook of Guru Har Gobind from his predecessors except perhaps on emphasis which was of course the need of the time. The last ten years of his life, the Guru passed in meditation, preaching the Gospel and living a very austere life. He insisted on simple virtues in life.

June 14, 1995 *Ramindar Singh*

Everyone equal in God's creation 22.10

"All are noble in God's eyes. None is lowly. All vessels are fashioned by the same maker; the same light illumines

the three worlds. Real enlightenment comes through God's grace and blessings, which are ineffaceable. Contentment, the true teacher is the tree, its flower is righteousness, its fruit illumination, which is ever fresh; it ripens through good actions and meditation; its eating brings joy. Do not forget the Almighty; leave the rest to His will." These were the appeals of one of the greatest bards of God, though he described himself as an idle minstrel chanting, night and day, His praise. That was Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, whose Jayanthi is being celebrated today.

Contrary to the generality of holymen and religious preachers of his time (15th century), Guru Nanak was not an advocate of total renunciation from the concerns of the material world. He commended the life of a householder, calling upon all men to combat the evils and injustices under which humanity was groaning. He had the clear vision of a just society as the goal of a man. He saw worldly pomp, wealth and glory as insubstantial. Rather than rituals, he suggested prayer, meditation and devotion. Pursued with sincerity, these lead to the uplifting of the soul which is the essence of religious experience.

An element of supernatural was witnessed in his life, right from the time of his birth in the year 1469 AD. His teachers were perplexed by the sudden flashes of intuitive power and knowledge displayed by him. Guru Nanak underwent enlightenment on the banks of river Bein.

The Guru's religious emphasis was basically ethical. The essence of his teaching is reflected in the prayer of the Sikhs, offered twice daily: "By grace of Nanak, may the spirit ascend to ever greater heights; may general weal descend on all creations by Divine grace." The accent is on the welfare of all spheres of human life, including, the family, the general community and the state.

Sri Surjit Singh Sahney in a lecture referred to the moral law the Guru envisaged in which those who lived away from God and in indulgence should one day fall under the weight of their own evil. In one of his exhortations, he had said, "Death of heroic men is blessed should they lay down their lives to approved causes." The Divine persons, except God the highest, are to be worshipped. The Guru ensured that community singing (kirtan) became a regular feature of the daily congregation in the Gurdwaras (Sikh temples). In one of the hymns, Nanak says, "The fire of worldly desires is quenched by the words of God. Let men turn towards Him and enshrine Him in his heart."

November 7, 1995

Seer who strove for religious freedom — 22.11

Time cannot wither or stale the lustre of the sacrifies that Guru Gobind Singh made for the cause of religious freedom. His transformation of the demoralised Hindu society of his time is a landmark in our history. Mankind has yet to know and appreciate his spiritual ideals and his own practical adherence to his dictates, and the way in which they sprouted and blossomed in the hearts of his followers.

A study of his life and personality and all that he achieved in a short span of 42 years that he lived, confirms that he has become a most eloquent symbol of all that is positive in our religious tradition. Gobind was born in Patna (Bihar) on this day in the year 1666 and was assassinated at Nandar (Deccan) in 1708 A.D.

He was hardly nine when Guru Teg Bahadur was martyred in Delhi. Guru Gobind Singh then assumed the spiritual suzerainty and became the tenth Guru. He was soon able

to consolidate the Sikhs into a body of brave fighting people with common loyalty and purpose. He has stated his life's mission, "Extend the legion of righteousness on earth, seize and destroy the evil and the sinful."

It reached its culmination point in 1699 when the guru introduced baptism -- Nectar ceremony(Amrit) -- for the saint-soldiers. They stood liberated, this transformation was verily a psychological miracle. Low born and untouchables shed their inborn and innate repression.

The outstanding example of Guru Gobind Singh's power to make the sparrow hunt the hawk and one man fight a legion was a sovereign tested truth after the baptism. These liberated souls were the Guru's Khalsa and his tribute to the Khalsa records: "All the battles I have won against tyranny I have fought with the devoted backing of these people."

The Guru had no personal ambitions or territorial aim. The struggle vividly portrays that Spirit ultimately triumphs over all impediments. His life's emblem of sacrifice, represents the price Spirit has to pay to redeem freedom.

The other great thing in the career of Guru Gobind Singh was his self-effacement in the domain of spiritual leadership. He abolished the office of an earthly guru. He declared that the Guru Granth was to act as the Guru henceforth and it will be the supreme leader and teacher, while his personality will amalgamate with the Khalsa. Thus he achieved his mission in life.

December 8, 1995 *Sahit and Parkashan Vibhag*

Spiritual values important in life 22.12

Nearly three centuries ago, on the first day of the 'Baisakhi' month, a new religious path was shown to the members of

the Sikh community infusing in them a fresh spirit of courage and bravery and arousing their dormant energy so as to stand up boldly against tyranny by the then rulers and to defend their faith. The credit for establishing the 'Khalsa Panth' goes to the last of the ten Sikh spiritual leaders, Guru Gobind Singh. (The corresponding day of this great event was observed all over India on April 13 this year).

The Khalsa enshrined the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book which contains besides the sacred utterances of the Sikh Gurus, the psalms and hymns of several saints of different religions, thereby revealing the unity of outlook and realism of vision.

Guru Gobind Singh while taking the great decision to create this new order clearly stated, "Let the Khalsa Panth roar in the whole world so that the Hindu Dharma will wake up once more." Before him (9th Guru) Teg Bahadurji who laid down his life to protect the spiritual tradition had said that no one could destroy the Hindu Law of righteous conduct. This new path provides happiness in this life and in the life hereafter. The scripture of Sikhism refers to one God, the need to replace arid philosophical wranglings. It is the only scripture in the world which has been accorded the status of the 'living embodiment of Guru' as enjoined by Gobind Singh, in his Khalsa.

The circumstances under which the mind of the tenth Sikh apostle conceived the transformation of the people into an aspiring religious and military commonwealth were explained in a lecture by Sri Surjit Singh Sahney. The Guru, who lost four of his sons in battles was keen to give something positive to the people. By announcing the formation of the Khalsa on Baisakhi in 1699, he asked the Sikhs to show bravery. He arranged for a new system of baptism and declared that he would convert jackals into lions. The Guru ordained

the Sikhs to worship and seek light from the holy Granth which, he said, would guide and rescue humanity from miseries and sufferings.

Guru Gobind Singh came into the world to spread the value of truth and justice, to destroy evil-doers and to help virtue flourish. His idea to evolve a new order was to make people understand the necessity of sacrificing their lives for the cause of rifhteousness The torch lit by Guru Nanak, the first Guru was kept alive by Guru Gobind Singh who instead of handing it over to an individual as had been the practice till then, gave it to the Khalsa.

April 18, 1996

Spirit of sacrifice ennobles man 22.13

There had been dark patches in Indian history when attempts were made to wipe out Hindu religion, by alien domination but it has survived because of its broad-based principles, giving scope for everyone to worship the form of God according to one's choice. Three centuries ago, an emperor wanted that only the religion he practised should be followed by all and took steps to persecute and force others to get converted. A religious leader opposing this said: "All must act according to the will of God. If it were God's decision that there should be only one religion, He would not have allowed so many of them to co-exist."

At one stage when people could not bear the atrocities of the ruler, the face of the saint whom they adored became gloomy. His nine-year-old child immediately said, "You are the holiest among all persons to save the religion." The remark surprised the father who later sacrificed his life, as he was beheaded. He was Guru Teg Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru

and the child Guru Gobind Singh, his successor, the 10th Guru who later fought courageously, saved religion from the jaws of tyranny and established the Khalsa Panth (Path) and infused confidence in the people.

The last of the Sikh spiritual leaders, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) initiated the Sikh Baptism ceremony, thus giving a distinctive identity to the Sikhs. Shortly before his passing away, he ordained that the Guru Granth Sahib containing the statements of the successive saints and other prominent leaders would be the spiritual authority for the Sikhs, while the temporal authority would vest in the Khalsa Panth, the Sikh commonwealth. The basic postulate of Sikhism is that life is not sinful in its origin but having emanated from a "Pure source," the "True one" abides in it.

In a lecture, Sri Surjit Singh Sahney said, when Guru Gobind Singh was informed of his father's execution, he declared that he would lay the foundation for the Khalsa Panth to make people brave all hazards and sacrifice everything for the just cause. A matchless warrior, he remained a saint at heart. The features of the new path he evolved were based on two principles, open diplomacy and shared democracy. The Khalsa was meant to be a global society.

Guru Gobind Singh came into this world with the special mission of performing certain duties for the emancipation of mankind. What he showed was a path of valour, devotion and sacrifice. He ordered that all those who were Sikhs should be baptised and should lead a pure and simple life. All were to be treated as equals and he abolished caste rather by implication than by direct enactment.

January 22, 1997

The founding of the Khalsa Panth 22.14

Saints appear in this world with a special mission, particularly when men are being persecuted in the name of religion. When they are so deputed by the Lord, they perform certain duties for humanity's emancipation. One such leader convinced the terror-stricken masses that no God or Goddess would be sent from heaven to protect them. This guide declared that he was born to spread true religion and to uproot the tyrants. He did not arrogate to himself the role of the Lord. The sad plight of the people and his own personal resentment about his father's execution generated in him a desire to act with conviction. He then evolved a new order with the sole object of making people realise the need for sacrificing their lives for the cause of upholding righteousness. This illustrious spiritual hero was Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last of the galaxy of Sikh Gurus. He established the Khalsa Panth on the Baisakhi day in the year 1699 A.D. It was a path of valour, devotion and sacrifice.

When Guru Gobind Singh was told that his father was executed and that no one had come forward to protest against this barbaric act by the then emperor, he decided he would lay the foundation of a new Order. "If there is one God, then there is also one man," he said. In general, men of his time were too modest in their aspirations, too averse to physical exertion and were demoralised, even though strongly attached to their religion.

Through his new moral order, he advised people that when all other means failed to check the tyranny of religious zeolots and bigots it was not unjust to unsheath the sword. He asked people to assemble at Anandpursahib on the Baisakhi day of 1699. At his call, when five sikhs offered their heads in surrender, the Guru baptised them by administering "Amrit" prepared with a double-edged sword (Khanda). These "chosen

five", were given the common surname "Singh" (lion) and were called members of the Khalsa, an army of the Lord, raised by Him, With God's light shining within, the Khalsa was meant to be a global society.

Explaining the significance of the Baisakhi day, Sri Surjit Singh Sahney said in a lecture that all those who were Sikhs should lead a clean, pure and simple life. Because of his efforts, a new nation of saint-soldiers arose. A tremendous change was effected in the whole tone of national character. The torch lit by the founder of Sikhism (Guru Nanak) was kept alive by his successors and eventually came to tenth Guru who gave it to the Khalsa, which he created to carry on the noble mission. This was a crowning event of the Guru's life from the standpoint of organisation and ideology.

April 15, 1997

Message of universal brotherhood 22.15

The birth of Guru Nanak in 1469 A.D. marked a turning point in medieval history. Born at a time when society was spilt into various groups based on caste, creed and religion, Nanak tried to unite humanity through the message of universal brotherhood and communal harmony and to launch a new movement for the establishment of an egalitarian society and a joint social order, For him all human beings were God's children. He advocated man's direct link with the Ultimate Reality. He denounced asceticism, monasticism, formalism and image worship and all rites and rituals connected with religious service.

His four odesseys took him to Assam in the east, Sri Lanka in the south, Tibet in the north and Mecca and the Islamic centres in the Middle East. People were attracted

to him because of his charismatic personality. Even as a child, he displayed a contemplative turn of mind, love for solitude and large-heartedness. He was generous by nature and exuded warmth and friendliness. Even while young, he composed many hymns effortlessly, which were spiritually meaningful. There was a moment of supreme transformation and enlightenment in his life when he stood face to face before God, who directed him to spread a new faith among people, based on discipline and purity of character.

Guru Nanak's unusual attire, attracted the attention of quite a few people. He was once asked, "To which faith do you belong?" His reply was, "I do not need symbols for my prayer. For me, the Lord's name is my 'salagram', good deeds my necklace and Divine grace, the anchor of my raft."

The episode of Guru Nanak's physical disappearance from Sultanpur and his re-appearance represented the Divine call he received for embarking on his noble mission. He travelled extensively, mostly on foot. He laid stress on charity and detachment while making an honest living. He was a bridge between the Hindus and the Muslims. He was probably the first to give India the concept of a Nation.

He advised people to be in the world but not worldly. In his teachings, adherence to dharma, company of holy men, morality and good conduct hold a very high place. To him, religion was a way of life.

A world teacher, Guru Nanak's message is of universal application and is relevant for all time and for the entire mankind. Guru Nanak, who founded Sikhism, gave new hope to the down-trodden mankind to join his fraternity as equals.

November 14, 1997 *Surjit Singh Sahney*

Ahimsa, the greatest of all virtues 23.1

"Never injure any life" is the *summum bonum* for righteous conduct as one of the greatest sages, who had concern for all creation, said in his work - A Guide for Humanity. For him, in fact, all other virtues are less important and can be listed below the principle of "Non-killing" or Ahimsa.

Unfortunately, people destroy living beings out of carelessness - while walking or undertaking any activity. A little precaution can certainly save so many lives - those of insects and others. It may be asked why should a person be worried about protecting these small insects since even if they are destroyed no loss would accrue to society. The answer is that since man has no power to resurrect an insect that is dead, he has no authority to take away its life. All scriptures, more particularly the Jain shastras, stress that "life is most precious". It is wrong to advocate that a human being has a right to take away the life of an animal or other smaller helpless creature. If that is so, Acharya Vikram Surishwarji said in his discourse, an identical argument can be advanced on behalf of the animal world that they, too, can take the life of a man. Is man ready to grant this "right" to animals? People should be vigilant while going about their daily routine not to cause harm to living beings to the extent possible.

A careless throwing away of a burning match sometimes results in a conflagration in which many may perish; a heavy burden on an undernourished animal may cause its extinction; heaps of dirt not removed, may become the breeding place of insects which may be destroyed by man. Saint Thiruvalluvar has denounced the sacrifice of animals in the name of religion. The chapter in Thirukkural on "Ahimsa", reflects the noble sentiments of Jainism.

October 13, 1982

Human body is as sacred as a shrine 23.2

The human body has been compared to a temple. It should hence be kept tidy and utilised for the benefit and good of others. The Sense organs should be under strict control and their attention be diverted only for the search of the Ultimate Reality. The human body consists of innumerable atoms, each having its own constitution. It functions as an individual unit but many combining to form the structure of the body. The manner in which each one of them has been constructed will disclose the nature of a man and his future.

Sages have rightly conceived the body as a shrine with a deity installed within it. Even as the inner portion as well as the external region of the temple are to be maintained clean, the body should also be held as sacred and should ever be free from dirt. For this, the five Sense organs should be retained under constant vigil. These organs the skin, tongue, nose, eyes and ears are meant for the achievement of high ideals and hence should not be used for tasting worldly pleasures.

Jain Acharya Sri Rajyash Surishwarji in a lecture said, when these Senses are allowed to go astray, the flow of spiritual knowledge stops. While ordinary men give them access to material enjoyment, sages have trained them to study the mysteries of the universe. Citing one of the 45 Agamas in the Jain Uttra-dhyan Sutras, the Acharya pointed out that the taste, touch, smell and speech should not be allowed a free sway. As in a temple, where even a king was not shown any special favour and was treated on par with a humble devotee, while understanding the power of the Senses in the body, one should keep himself free from happiness and sorrows, displaying detachment. There are a few more similarities between the temple and the human frame. Generally, the former is to be opened after Sun rise and closed during Sun set; people

should also take food between the two periods. (as per Jain religion). As a lamp is kept burning before the deity, a human being should keep himself enlightened with the torch of spiritual knowledge. Though the deity never literally partakes the food offered but "accepts" it, the soul in the body should possess a knowledge about the worldly occurrences but not mingle with them and get into the mire of pleasures.

June 4, 1991

Mahavira's path to ecstasy, prosperity 23.3

The use of a weapon is an act of timidity and not bravery. The main condition to bring peace on the earth is to bury all armaments. The use of arms to obtain Justice is an atrocious way of destruction from which no one can gain anything. Love and mercy are the elixir of the earth. To take revenge for an offence is an obsolete idea and many who had resorted to this sort of cruelty have been wiped out. These sentiments are based on the life and teachings of Bhagawan Mahavira, the Jain spiritual leader who showed the way to achieve peace through non-violence.

When Mahavira appeared in the world nearly 2500 years ago, the entire nation was plunged in violence, wars, injustice, superstition and discrimination. Sacrifice of birds and animals was considered a pious ritual. 'Measure for measure' was treated as a valiant deed. To kill and to die in the war were believed as pathways to reach heaven, Mahavira's task was to make people live in amity. From his childhood, Mahavira's mind was attracted towards creating conditions where all will live together. He decided that the cause of unhappiness was the pursuit of the fallacious method adopted by many. He showed the path of ecstasy and prosperity. At the age

of 30, he donated his wealth for a year to poor and took renunciation. After purifying his soul through penance, tolerance and meditation, he started preaching the message of peace, love and nonviolence.

Any type of killing and violence was cursed, he pointed out to the people. Even to kill an insect is cruelty. A person who kills a worm today, will not hesitate to do away with the life of another human being later to gain a small sum or to take revenge. Such a man will have no respect or value for life. Hurting another living being is to deprive its fundamental right. It is a felony against God. The only solution to put an end to violence is to adopt Bhagawan Mahavira's directives. Muni Ajitshekhar Vijay (Aler-Hyderabad) said, once when Mahavira was engaged in meditation a celestial disturbed him. He continued his austerities without showing any annoyance. After six months, the celestial returned to his place, Mahavira's eyes were filled with tears for the mercy shown by God. This serves as an example that love should not give room to hatred. Compassion and pardon are the instruments to totally curb enmity and to fight against injustice and intolerance.

April 5, 1993

Detachment will lead to mental balance 23.4

A worldly man is invariably a slave of two mighty currents of the mind - attraction and repulsion. He is happy when he experiences pleasures but sad when he is faced with sorrow. He clings to pleasant objects while he runs away from those which cause him pain. The majority of the people are not able to resist passion and desires. But the one who conquers them will be calm and composed. Even men of indomitable moral strength showed signs of weakness and fell victim to worldly temptations.

Sacred literature tells how by developing an attitude of detachment, it may be possible to maintain mental balance. The will power not to be swayed by desires and lust knowing that worldly objects and experiences are purely temporary and curbing the weakness to possess what others have, should be cultivated by practice and from childhood. A story from Jain scriptures point out that a dispassionate man is not affected by both pleasure and pain and how all honour ought to be showered on conquerors of carnal desires.

Four disciples once approached their spiritual master. The first said he would undergo penance by sitting on the wooden lid of a dry well. The second expressed his intention to meditate at the mouth of a dark den where a lion lived. The third declared that he too would conduct penance in a mountain chasm where pythons abounded. The youngest among them said he would carry out his discipline in the dancing-hall of a courtesan, a statement which naturally evoked laughter and derision from others.

The young "sadhu" who had once been a visitor to the courtesan's house, was now absolutely unconcerned about her charm and continued his austere life even while living in her house. Her music and dance did not disturb his concentration. When he returned to the hermitage after some time, his Acharya found him pure, radiating spiritual aura. One of the other sadhus did not like this praise and could not express his discontent to the master. He too went to the harlot's house but could not control his mind as his character was found wanting. Narrating this story, Acharya Sri Rajyash Surishwarji in a lecture said one can develop dispassion by looking into the defects of sensual life. Detachment from all objects, at all times will result in obtaining knowledge of the Self.

October 22, 1993

Knowledge helps one face challenges 23.5

Spiritual knowledge will help us shape our lives properly. We will then be in a position to face challenges and solve problems without getting agitated or confused. This knowledge will enable us realise the defects within us and lead us to the goal of salvation. This in turn will make us see only the virtues in others. More important is that real knowledge will provide us with humility, creating at the same time, the ability to have a correct vision of our future. The teacher who imparts it should be given all respect and seated on a higher level.

A king who desired to get himself equipped with such Divine introspection got down from his throne, requesting the Acharya to occupy it, indicating how he shed his superiority, yielding to humility. This rare quality of respecting others opinions were in-built in our culture as witnessed in the age old ties between a couple, the parents and wards, the teacher and the taught and the master and the disciple. Acquisition of the knowledge of the ideal relationship between one another will provide us the power to discriminate between the real and evil. Krishna and Sudhama studied together for years and learnt several topics.

Acharya Sri Rajyash Surishwarji in a lecture narrated the story of three experts crossing a river in a boat. The mathematician asked the boatman whether he knew mathematics. When the latter pleaded ignorance the mathematician told him: "A fourth of your life has been wasted". So too was his (boatman) reply to a scientist who pitied that he has wasted another one-fourth of life. The third was a geography master who too received the same answer and hence the boatman was told about another part of his life. Suddenly there was flood in the river and the boatmen politely asked all the three whether they knew how to swim. When all of them replied in the negative, he said "your whole life is wasted".

Knowledge without the capacity to discriminate may be of no use during crisis. Indian heritage points out how surplus money should be used to promote noble causes. Getting continuous water supply in our pipeline will not mean it should be wasted. Likewise money with men lacking culture will prove to be a curse. A young man who became wealthy dedicated his earnings to his parents stating that it belonged to them since they had brought him up with discipline.

February 5, 1994

Sublime teachings of Mahavira 23.6

'Peace.... between man and man, between man and animal, peace everywhere and in all things, ensuring perfect brotherhood of all that lives'. This phrase carries with it the whole thought of the Jains. It is this ideal that they endeavour to realise upon earth. Jains, like Hindus, believe that there are cycles of time and in each, 24 great prophets come to the world. They were known as Thirthankaras or perfect men (or Arhats or Jinas) who conquered the lower nature and reached divinity. The "Kalpa Sutra" of the Jains contains the lives of the 24 Jinas, the last of whom was Bhagawan Mahavira, the mighty hero. His life was simple but his teachings are sublime. Called Vardhamana at birth, he took to asceticism later, practising austerities for 12 years before becoming a great teacher. He died 526 years before the birth of Christ.

The Jains offer prayers to the liberated souls whom they look upon as Gods. The vows taken by them are: they shall not cause violence to other living beings; not utter untruth; not commit theft; not indulge in adultery and shall set a limit to the desire for worldly possessions. These serve as guideposts for those who are in search of the 'Self'. Mahavir contributed towards the resurrection of the Jain 'Dharma'

(code). He taught the 'Karma' (man goes up or comes down by his actions) philosophy for cultivating self-restraint. non-killing (ahimsa), for universal peace and prosperity and the Law of relativity (syadwada) to advise people not to accumulate wealth. 'Never remain negligent even for a while' were his last words, when he attained salvation (nirvana) at the age of 72 after delivering a speech for 48 hours.

The Jain Acharya Shri Rajyash Surishwarji, in a message, mentioned the four-fold duties of a devotee - to give charity, (daana), to maintain character and to be austere (sheela), to observe penances like abstaining from food on important occasions, meditation and recitation from holy texts (tapas) and lastly to strive to live up to high ideals (bhava). Among them the easiest way for householders to prosper is to practise philanthropy, as charity is held as the brightest ornament of a family man who should look after the frugal needs of those who have opted for a life of total detachment. A perfect development of the soul and conducting oneself in such a manner as to be beneficial to others are the twin aims of human life. A person who does not react to the hardship experienced by others may even prove cruel. Those who always do good to others can walk with their heads erect even on the roughest path of life, says Mahavira.

April 23, 1994

Renunciation is a mental exercise 23.7

Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism are the major religions of India. How to get rid of recurring births has been explained by all the three. According to them, a person goes down by his wicked acts and that birth as man is based on both his good and evil deeds. Acquisition of true knowledge about the cause of getting caught in the cycle of re-appearances

in the world, reposing faith in Reality, observance of austerities and pursuit of the path of right conduct are some of the guidelines given by the scriptural authority.

Jainism, which is an ancient religion, believes that the tenets are revealed in every era by Thirthankaras. In the present age, Rishabadeva was the first and Mahavira, the last of such distinguished guides. The religion maintains that renunciation is not merely physical; It is primarily mental. Hence preparation to lead ultimately a spiritual life begins early. Five ethical principles have been prescribed towards this goal, Mahavira has listed them as non-violence (ahimsa), Truth (Sathya), non-stealing (asteya), celibacy (Brahmacharya) and non-possession (aparigraha). The first among these is considered the most important. Observance of non-violence entails a positive and all-comprehensive view of life. Though an act reckoned as violent is to be avoided, the man's intention should also be pure. The mind should be free from the very thought of acting against ethical conduct. Truth should be practised by all. Non-stealing signifies absolute contentment with one's possession, not even wanting to take hold of another's. Evil practices in trade and commerce go against this principle. Celibacy in the case of a married man is total faithfulness to his spouse and in the case of an ascetic, complete abstention from the very thought of sex. Non-possession indicates that there should be no desire to obtain more than one's just needs.

To illustrate how outward abandonment is meaningless if one has not controlled oneself, Acharya Rajyash Surishwarji, in a lecture, mentioned the story of a king coming across another ruler, who was in deep meditation, not aware of any event happening around him. Lord Mahavira explained to the former that at that moment, the meditating-king was indeed in hell as his thoughts were about an enemy attacking

his territory. After some time, the Lord said the king was now in paradise as he had abandoned all thoughts about his country and that this mind was attuned to God as he saw no real enemy at all. Happiness can be experienced if a person takes to the path of virtue and keeps faith in the teachings of holy men.

July 27, 1994

Anger hinders progress 23.8

Among the internal foes which constantly try to destroy a man and confront him at every stage of his progress, anger occupies the prime place. Under the influence of anger, man will abuse, insult and quarrel with his kith and kin. Even the powers realised by his penance will be wiped out. It is a strong emotion, excited by a real or a fancied injury and involving a desire for retaliation. It effaces reason making a person commit acts which cannot be dreamt of. Indignation, fury, rage, wrath, irritation, frowning and resentment are its different varieties, classified according to the degree of intensity. A good man's anger lasts for a second, a middlings for three hours, a base one's for a day and a night, and a great sinner's, until death.

According to a saint, anger represents weakness of mind, the immaturity of a soul. Only an unhealthy man can get angry and a weak person may lose control of his mind and become enraged. A tired man may also get irritated quickly. Anger begets injustice, rashness, persecution, jealousy, cruelty and harsh comments. All religious leaders have suggested steps to avoid getting worked up and to maintain balance of approach even under provocation. They have advised people to nip it in the bud. They have urged men to be serene and tranquil under all circumstances.

From his observations in life, Jain Acharya Sri Rajyash Surishwarji has formulated a few tips to control anger. When in a frenzied mood, man loses his energy which results in hating others". Never talk to anyone when you are extremely tired because fatigue induces irritability. When you are upset, as you may take time to cool down, avoidance of conversation or dialogue during that time is necessary. If you have been insulted, do not utter any word till you are free from its shock. Never be afraid of imaginary dangers thereby making a mountain of a mole-hill. You should realise that there is scope to overcome any situation. Optimism should be your watch word".

"Sages have indeed suggested that when there is any room to get agitated, you should immediately retire to a lonely place and on return, you will feel relieved. When calm recollect the causes for your anger and think about the damage that has arisen from such situation. In your happy moments, you should note down the advantages of mind control. There will be some elderly people around you who would have remained unaffected by problems and their example should be kept in mind". A human being has in him both good and bad qualities but it is self-restraint that will raise him above other creations. It is easy to return good for good but it is sublime to do good for evil.

November 9, 1995

Maintain equanimity in the wake of trials 23.9

Man often finds himself dazed by the bewildering problems which confront him, tries his best to overcome them but feels the task not only difficult but at times impossible. This

results in his losing his balance because he is in unable to find out the cause for the tests he undergoes. Sometimes they may arise due to lack of self-control and on other occasions on account of the likes and dislikes he harbours. That is the reason why saintly men and scriptural texts try to impress on humanity in general, the need to maintain equanimity so that even in the wake of trials, people may not get demoralised. In other words, they are advised to realise that a balanced life, is true Yoga. Balance has to be maintained in every field of life. There will be misery and agony when this is disturbed. He should also keep his thoughts pure, without allowing them to go astray.

A story is told of the son of a powerful person who complained to his mother against another boy who had used foul language. When the woman conveyed this to her husband, he said, "Let our son forgive the boy, If he has cultivated spiritual balance, he should forgive the other. Otherwise he may repay the injustice in the same coin". A dignitary used to put down his angry thoughts when they overpowered him on a piece of paper and leisurely analyse the reasons for losing his temper. This technique helped him to correct the imbalances in him. By adopting spiritual practices, many got their similar defects rectified.

The tendency to take to the path of materialism should give place to spiritualism. At the same time, powers should be developed to fight hedonism, said Acharya Rajyash Surishwarji in his lecture on the occasion of Mahavir Jayanti. Forgiveness will enable a person to drink a cup of hemlock and offer a cup of nectar to the other. Self-control will solve the problems that a man may have to face while understanding other's views and cultivating patience will surely result in his success

Lord Mahavira has preached us to be friendly with every living being. Human nature is such that people always want

to be ever at the receiving end but reluctant to part with anything. Even otherwise, friendship that is developed purely for selfish reasons may get snapped at any time. The only way to give up this attitude is to first purify the mind and thus remain balanced under all circumstances. This can be achieved only by the worship of God. There should be a constant search within as to why and where one had committed mistakes and adopt measures to remain calm even when challenges arise. It is equally necessary not only to forget the mistakes of friends, but also, pardon those who had been inimical to him.

April 2, 1996

Ahimsa, a positive Doctrine of Love 23.10

Ancient Indian religion had two independent traditions - the Vedic and the Sramana. While the orthodox systems arose within the Vedic tradition which later came to be systemised into different schools. the Sramana tradition had a large following among the Kshatriyas, though with the passage of time and long co-existence the two traditions influenced each other adopting customs from one another.

Jainism as we know it today is the successor of the Sramana Dharma. The Sramana tradition within the Indian religion and philosophy has a hoary past. Jainism which is one of the oldest living religions of the world was propounded by Bhagawan Mahavira (599 B.C.-527 B.C) the 24th Thirthankara and traces its origin to Rishabadeva who is the first Thirthankara. So Jainism is certainly older than Mahavira before whom were a succession of 23 Thirthankaras. Jainism propounds the Doctrine of Freedom of the soul. It maintains its independent existence in the state of bondage and liberation. This enjoins on man the responsibility and insight to tread the path of

spiritual exertion to liberate himself. Mahavira led a life of renunciation which is the chief characteristic of this religion. But renunciation is not a passive conformity to fatalism; on the contrary it requires vigorous spiritual exertion and effort for constant self purification. Jainism is predominantly an ethical religion stressing the five principles prescribed by Mahavira to his followers: Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (celibacy) and Aparigraha (non-possession). Of these five principles Ahimsa is considered to be the most important.

In his address Acharya Kalapurna Surishwarji said, the Doctrine of Ahimsa which was the founding principle of Jainism insisted on the strict observance of non-violence. The ethics of non-violence can be appreciated fully if it is of applied in daily life as a positive philosophy of love. Though the principle of Ahimsa has a negative connotation, in practice it must result in a positive feeling of goodwill and a comprehensive view of life. Non-violence and non-killing are understood generally as acts, so that it absolves one of the sins that might accrue to him if he refrained from committing the prohibited acts. Though on the surface Ahimsa is understood as the act itself, Jaina philosophy is clear in that the intention which precedes the act must be pure. Hence it is the control of mind which is more important. Thus a co-ordination of the mind and body is essential for the practice of non-violence.

May 22, 1996

Reality Buddha faced 24.1

Whenever there was degeneration in the field of religion, outstanding God-men used to appear to revive its glory. In what way did these great spiritual leaders differ from ordinary men?

First, they spoke only what they had realised. When they explained about God and Truth, they had no need to reason it out or explain from scriptures that they had seen God. They preached what they had perceived. Second, they had tremendous faith in their mission. Third, they had something to give to mankind in the context of the time they lived. One chief idea they propagated was selflessness. Such a great visionary was the Buddha. Though his teachings were consistent with the noblest ideals of other faiths and with the essential truths of religion there were misconceptions, misrepresentations and confusion created in expounding Buddhism to an extent by some disciples in later days. Buddha Purnima is thrice blessed because on this day (but in different years). Siddhartha (later turned as the Buddha) was born, got illumination and breathed his last.

In a lecture, Swami Tyagananda said, as a prince, Siddhartha was kept in a solitary residence with all comforts, with the specific purpose that he should not witness the sufferings in the world. He was surrounded on all sides by all that was delightful. Once on a visit to places beyond his palace, he saw a man who was aged, palsied, weak and tottering. He was told that all those who lived should turn old. He then met a person suffering from a horrible disease. Next he had the sight of a corpse being carried. Death, he was informed, is the final end of everyone. Later he met an ascetic, calm and happy because his life was fixed in the eternal.

There was a total transformation in his outlook and he discarded comforts and went forth alone, as a monk, seeking the cause for human sorrow and the cure for woes. Thenceforth he was called the Buddha. The existential inescapable realities made him search for a solution. The light of Divine wisdom dawned upon him when he sat under a tree in Gaya. He knew the cause of world's sorrow. viz desire, attachment and ignorance. India had accepted the Buddha but not Buddhism. His directives were 'Be good and talk good'. There is Truth in our heart. Do not put off the tasks required of life.

May 19, 1992

Rajgir - the favourite resort of Buddha 24.2

Bihar can well claim to be the birth place and flourishing centre of Buddhism during 567 BC to 247 BC. This was the land where Prince Siddhartha (Goutama) became the Buddha. Rajagriha, the first place visited by the Buddha before and after he attained enlightenment, is now known as Rajgir. This place has been immortalised in the sacred texts as the favourite resort of the Buddha. It was one of the 16 great cities during his time. Vardhamana Mahavira, founder of Jainism, is said to have spent 14 rainy seasons at Rajagriha, the then capital of the powerful kingdom of Magadha. After enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, the Buddha is said to have returned to this place. Historically, Prince Siddhartha directed his steps towards Uruvel, the present Gaya in search of a teacher. Disappointed in his efforts, he came to Rajagriha. Emperor Bimbasara met him and paid his respects.

It was here that the Buddha spent many years propagating his message. Many of his disciples visited him and it was here he performed the miracle of taming a mad elephant let loose at him by his jealous cousin Devadatta.

The Buddha's teachings had not been written down during his life time but were preserved orally by fellow monks. However, there seems to have been no unanimity among his followers about his teachings which he had left in the form of aphorisms. However a Council held in 483 BC seems to have determined in a systematic way, the creed of Buddhism at Rajagriha. In the hills at this place, a structure has been identified as the residence of Maha Kasyapa, the organiser of this first Buddhist Council.

A remarkable structure exists in this place where the 28-day duel between Jarasandha and Bhima, an episode from the Mahabharata, took place. There is also a hill which is said to be the Buddha's favourite resort to take rest. Buddhist legends also speak of several resting places for the monks. The greatness of Rajgir has become unforgettable for the rich monuments centred around the Buddha's life and activities.

July 25, 1993

Suffering is a fact of life 24.3

Some of the guidelines prescribed by the wisemen of ancient days may appear to be inapplicable, irrelevant and invalid in modern days because of the unimaginable changes which had taken place over the centuries. 'Adopt right type of livelihood' said the Buddha nearly 2500 years ago, meaning thereby money should be earned not by adopting evil methods and that there should be honesty in trade and profession. But now society itself has been totally transformed and the advice given by the Buddha may not hold good. In spite of the altered circumstances, some can face the challenges and avoid the wrong path. But courage is needed because men of virtue may even be branded as mad. What have been laid down by seers of the past, if upheld, can make us become

spiritual and pursue the proper course to maintain good conduct.

A prince who chanced to see the misery of the people forthwith took to ascetic way of life and brought about a change in society by his teachings. Gauthama thus became the Buddha, a saviour of the world. The secret of this pathfinder was that by the extinction of desires, man can rise to peace, Avoiding the two extremes prevailing then, viz. self-indulgence and self-mortification, he trod the middle path, which led to insight and wisdom. What he chose could be explained as "Do not overeat or starve completely, do not overwork or be totally lazy". His thinking was clear as found in the eight-fold directives he laid down.

According to the Buddha, suffering is a fact of life. Few can claim they had no sorrow. If there is no suffering, there will be no need for religion or God. Birth, decay and death are its cause. He traced the origin of misery to desire and craving. Human wants are infinite and endless. The eight-fold suggestions he made to end it were; 'Right understanding, right thinking, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right endeavour, right action and right meditation.' The advice to always utter Truth is of relevance even today. Mind should be controlled, gossip should be avoided, attachment ought to be given up and equanimity maintained. Suffering will cease with the abandoning of the thirst for desires.

In a lecture on Buddha Purnima, Swami Smarananda said the teachings of the Buddha giving an ethical code were practical and were addressed to the conscience of his hearers, in clearest terms. Earnestness is the path to Nirvana (Immortality) and thoughtlessness the path of death. Anger has to be overcome by love; evil by good; greed by

liberality and lies by Truth. He who is free from desires knows neither grief nor fear. The Buddha's Doctrines can be summed up as "Avoid doing all wicked actions, practise the most perfect virtue and thoroughly subdue your mind".

May 27, 1994

Tibetan Buddhists 'Mandala' 24.4

Buddhists believe that the seed of enlightenment in each person's mind is nourished in the process of visualising and contemplating on a 'Mandala' a circle representing the wheel of time, the universe and the Buddha's enlightened mind. Tradition had it that senior monks being initiated into higher forms of Buddhist mysticism are asked to make the mandalas to help them meditate on a particular deity. The mandalas enable them to visualise abstract ideas. Buddhists also believe that the mandala offers spiritual healing to anyone who sees it. A mandala, they say is a storehouse of vast amounts of spiritual energy.

More than one lakh Tibetan Buddhists came to India after the failed uprising in 1959. They are being led by the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of six million Tibetans worldwide who revere him as a living deity. The monks keep their ancient traditions alive at three monasteries in India. Most of their ancient texts were destroyed and the monks rely on the memory of the few elders among them. Each mandala is a sacred mansion of a particular deity, who represents qualities such as compassion and bliss. Detailed instructions on representing each deity are mentioned in ancient Sanskrit texts and in the discourses of the Buddha. The monks after offering prayers to the mandala for four or five days destroy the design to highlight the impermanence of all worldly things.

December 18, 1994

Enduring elements of religion 24.5

Whenever ideals in society got diluted and distorted, religious teachers appeared to rectify the ills and to inspire the masses to rise above worldliness. Even after their time their teachings continue to have relevance. Nearly 25 centuries ago Gautama Buddha appeared when people were under the influence of excessive ritualism having lost sight of the enduring elements or religion which promote harmony in society. His teachings resulted in major shifts in religious understanding. Those who were religiously inclined in that age were more concerned about values pertaining to the other world heaven and hell - that they had no time to devote to matters which would enhance the quality of life in this birth. Buddha shifted the pre-occupation with "other worldliness" to life here and now, pointing out that the spiritual goal has to be pursued and realised in this life.

Further he shifted the emphasis from scriptural study to personal quest, Said the Buddha, "Do not believe in doctrines because they have been handed down to you through generations, do not believe blindly in anything because it is followed by many. Have deliberation and analyse, and when the result agrees with reason and conduces to the good of one and all, accept it and live up to it." He awakened people to the reality of spiritual experience.

In his discourse Swami Tyagananda said, Gautama the Buddha was indeed thrice blessed since all the three important incidents in his life - birth, enlightenment and Mahanirvana - occurred on the same full moon day. Though born a prince he renounced everything after he understood the ephemerality of life witnessing an old man, a sick person and a dead body, and sat with conviction under the Bodhi tree till he became enlightened.

He denounced exploitation of the masses who were discriminated due to social prejudices. While inequalities are inevitable in society they should not lead to discrimination. Social justice must ensure freedom for every individual to actualise his innate nature and use it constructively for the community. This principle was practically applied in the founding of the Sangha in which any one irrespective of caste, colour or creed was admitted. Another important teaching of the Buddha is that spiritual life must not be individualistic, thus emphasising collective prayer and practice which promote love and compassion towards others. Thus non-violence became the lietmotif of Buddhism. The root cause of all human suffering is ignorance and only true understanding can foster love for others. Buddha's life further is a pointer that it is only through renunciation that it is possible to realise the spiritual goal.

May 24, 1997

Inner urge to reach the Almighty 25.1

The capacity to realise God lies dormant in everyone; what is required is the motive force to kindle that spiritual consciousness by a proper method (Sadhana). An aspirant can be compared to a mountaineer, who during his trek rests for a while. But when he senses impending danger from a wild beast he forgets his weariness and the inherent stamina latent in him is suddenly brought to the fore, guiding him to safety. Knowing that God is the indweller in every creation, he should get rid of the feeling that "I am the doer and enjoyer" and discard illusion to obtain mental bliss. He should exhibit his deep yearning and humbly request God and the Divine Mother to bestow on him the sense to awaken.

Swami Ishwarananda Giri of Mount Abu, said a devotee should entertain the idea that everything evolves from the Supreme Being and thus get illumined. The inner urge to reach the Almighty must not be temporary but remain constant and forever. This emotional anxiety to be in union with God is demonstrated in the life of Sri Appayya Dikshitar, whose contribution to scriptural literature is stupendous and copious. Wondering whether all his knowledge was a mere burden, he tested his depth of devotion, by consuming poison, which made him temporarily demented, during which period, his recorded utterances turned out to be brilliant hymns.

March 25, 1972

The way to true happiness 25.2

Everyone desires happiness, but in pursuing it he does the very things which he should avoid. The result is, naturally, misery and mental unrest. The root cause for this paradoxical

situation is that he lacks true knowledge of the Self. Thinking himself to be independent, he acts autocratically and whimsically. Within a limited circle, as for instance in a family, an office or organisation, an individual may be the "controller" and possess immense powers. At the same time, he is also subject to the control of God Unless one realises this fact and moulds his way of life accordingly, true happiness cannot be attained. Whatever happiness is obtained, if at all, as a result of the efforts made by the temporal powers that be, harnessing science and technology, is at best temporary. "Unlimited and unending happiness is possible only by following the path shown by Lord Krishna", said Sri A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder-Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in a discourse.

The Swami said the human form of life, which came to one after numerous births afforded the most precious opportunity to solve the problems posed by the afflictions of disease, decrepitude and death, which nobody liked but yet has to meet with necessarily. The Vedic literature was meant to solve it. In the present day world people had fallen so low that they had neither the time nor the capacity to study and comprehend the Vedanta. Hence emphasis was laid by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu on chanting the names of God (Nama Sankirtan) which cleansed the soul of the mass impurities that it had acquired over the countless births it had taken. Reciting the Hare Krishna Mantra, leading a simple and pure life and engaging oneself in the services of the Lord, with the consciousness that one belonged to Sri Krishna would ensure eternal bliss.

January 3, 1976

Maha Sivarathri, a day of deliverance 25.3

Maha Sivarathri is a day of deliverance to everyone, as Lord Siva sheds His grace on everyone who even accidentally or unintentionally listens to His "Sankirtan" (extolling His glory). Contemplation on this fountain of grace and one of the Holy Trinity in the Hindu Pantheon, is fruitful as the worshipper will enjoy longevity, success and prosperity in all fields without let or hindrance. One who is true, courageous, pure and who reposes faith in the majesty of Lord Siva will receive inspiration and get released from worldly bondage. His worship will transform the mind and make people spiritually alert and attain oneness with Him. On this night, the thoughts undergo alchemy, identifying themselves with the Cosmic Soul. Lord Siva resides in the hearts of men of piety and purity. He does not make any distinction between persons and does not carry any prejudice. Lord Siva gulped the poison that emanated while the ocean of milk was churned by devas and asuras and is hence called "Neelakanta." Anyone who fasts on the day when He consumed the poison (Sivarathri) and keeps awake all night meditating on the Lord will secure His blessings.

In a discourse Sri Pandrimalai Swamigal related an instance of a sinner who on Sivarathri happened to listen to a dissertation on Lord Siva throughout the night and was re-born as a ruler and still later as Veerabhadra. Similarly, a hunter who was chased by a wild animal, perched himself on a tree. During his vigil in the night, he plucked a few leaves and threw them down, not knowing that they were from a Bilva tree and that they fell on a Siva Lingam below. It was Sivarathri and his wife at home was also anxiously awaiting his return. For their sacrifice, they were richly rewarded.

March 8, 1978

Control of mind by meditation 25.4

Our scriptures, sages and seers have told us that the goal of life is happiness. But real happiness or bliss cannot be found in the outside world. It is to be experienced within us, and unless a person has it, he will not feel satisfied, no matter how much material comfort or wealth he may enjoy. He will always desire more. But once he starts experiencing the inner ecstasy, irrespective of what he has or does not have, he will feel totally satisfied.

A parable is told of a man who, living in a small house found the stay of his mother-in-law irksome; Circumstances at home not being congenial, he sought the advice of a saint who, to his surprise, told him to keep his chicken inside the house. Later, he asked his geese, goats and cows, too, in succession, to be huddled inside. The man wondered at this because his problems swelled. The saint then directed him to drive the animals away. Carrying out his instruction, the man suddenly felt there was more space in the house and peace too. Conditions remained the same but it was the mind that produced the change.

Swami Nityananda, in a discourse said that although wise men were telling us that the answer to all difficulties could be found by "turning within" and discovering their own "inner Self", almost no one knew how to do it. "Everyone feels that he has a tremendous untapped potential yet none can unlock it". That sleeping power within can be awakened only by the grace of a Guru, a "realised" master who possesses the ability to transmit his own spiritual energy to others.

The released energy virtually "gives a push" so that when the initiated man sits in meditation, his mind looks "within" and experiences the bliss and intuitive wisdom that lies there.

He will then witness a new balance in his life as a result of which he will do better work. Whatever he enjoys inside will manifest outwardly.

Meditation is for everyone and the philosophy propagated by the process of Siddha Meditation reflects the basic teaching of the Indian tradition as a whole. It tells us that we need not give up our jobs or families to realise God. We simply have to learn how to experience God while leading our normal lives. For this, the key is meditation.

July 28, 1980

Siddha Yoga shows the way to inner peace 25.5

Man is in eternal quest for perfection and he tries to achieve this in the content of material life, presuming that a good family, a secure job and such other things will provide it.

However, later he feels he has still not obtained what he expected. This is due to lack of awareness that such perfection can be found within oneself. The spiritual energy that creates supreme fulfilment is available within him. To really develop and enjoy one's gifts and character, one should meditate on the source of all satisfaction - the "Inner Self".

Even though the place is inside oneself, many do not know how to reach there. But the grace-bestowing power of God is in the Guru who can awaken the dormant power (Shakthi) within. After his initiation, commences the fascinating God-ward journey. There will be a feeling of peace within oneself and of the presence of the Divine.

Siddha Yoga, being propagated by Swami Muktananda, aims to kindle the Divine consciousness within the seekers, by means of "Shakti path" and help them to turn the mind inwards. "Meditate on your Self. God Dwells within you" is the core of the message of the Swami's mission.

In an introductory lecture to the Siddha Yoga Swami Gopalananda, a black American and former Professor of Educational Psychology, who has joined the mission of Swami Muktananda said meditation and chanting are the paths to this inner world.

The compassionate power of the Guru's grace brings everyone in touch with the new level of being. When Siddha Yoga is practised, one becomes capable of experiencing the Self. The Guru teaches us how to turn our mind inwards, through the process of meditation. Yoga provides a practical technique to realise one's potential in every aspect of life. To find an answer to various problems, one should dive deep within oneself, which will bring one in contact with the eternal source of bliss. This source is the Self.

The glory of Siddha Yoga lies in its naturalness and spontaneity. The outlook of the seeker, whose inner being through the Guru's grace is unfolded, will change after the Yoga and he will develop self-control, discipline and broad-mindedness.

January, 21, 1982

The aim of religion 25.6

Religion should rediscover how to express love and merge with God. Indian and Western philosophies are rooted in what is termed "Darsana" (vision), which means you see God

or experience oneness with Him. The highest philosophies share this same ultimate Truth which, existing in and behind everything,has never belonged to any one person or organisation. "God belongs to Himself and to that person who, through devotion and understanding, strives to know Him and attain Him".

Yet, somehow this Truth is seized upon by different sects or dogmatists who turn what is universal and transcendent, into something small and limited. "Philosophers do not realise the all-prevasiveness of God in all philosophies". Citing the instance of blind men encountering an elephant., each touching a part and describing it, according to his fancy, as a rope, or a broom, or a winnowing basket or a pillar, Swami Muktananda said too many religions stressed a particular approach to something resoundingly universal; they forgot that there was nothing existing anywhere that was not God. In a discourse, he said modern religion now functioned only to play up the apparent differences between men and their relationships to God. All faiths arose as a result of the undying urge of men to directly experience the deepest part of the human condition. Kashmir Saivism recognised the entire universe to be a manifestation of Divine consciousness. Man's foremost duty in life was to know the "Self". Siddha Yoga urges all seekers to the awareness that "God lives within you, as you". Through the grace of a Siddha Guru and the process of meditation, anyone can turn inward and experience this Divine Truth.

February 22, 1982

The best form of worshipping God 25.7

Man can lead a happy life, free from cares and worries, if he can learn to be like a child. The child is fearless and goes about merrily because there is the mother to look after.

All of us are children of God and we can also be fearless. The courage and confidence must be born out of the realisation that God is there to help us, to guide us and to, lead us onward in our life's journey. We are not alone while facing our problems and difficulties.

Through regular and systematic prayers, one can become aware of God's presence. In the initial stages, prayers may be mechanical. One should continue the practice. One should also, every now and then, amidst his varied activities, remember God. Again, one should learn to accept every happening in his life. Since God is all-love, everything is only for the good and for one's progress only. One cannot claim to love God if he cannot love his fellowmen and fellow-creatures. The best form of worshipping God is to serve the poor and the needy, the sick and the suffering.

Sri J.P. Vaswani in a lecture said that science and technology had conferred great benefits on man. The modern man has got more comforts and more amenities. But he lacks peace and happiness. Fear, anxiety, disappointment and frustration grip him. The present-day ills are all the result of man turning away from God. He has been relying more and more on his intelligence which is fallible and hence meeting with failure and frustration. He has brought on himself all his problems by his alienation from God.

December 30, 1982

Problems will vanish if people turn selfless 25.8

The essence of all scriptural teachings can be described in brief as "Be good and do good". This ideal can be realised

only through adherence to ethical and moral values. The respect for the latter in turn could be cultivated through "Knowledge" (Vidya). These teachings are contained in every religion but there should be some agency to dig them out and present them to the people.

In spite of material comforts, the West seems to need peace and joy. America for instance is wealthy but it is "rich" in diseases. People feel frustrated. Lack of spiritual knowledge and of godly life are the reasons for this mood of dejection. Absence of prayers in schools, the atmosphere in homes not being congenial and stoppage from visiting churches, all make them go in search of tranquility. This peace they temporarily find in drugs as they appear to provide "instant" relief. In recent times, many have taken to Yoga, finding it extremely beneficial.

Swami Satchidananda, Founder, Integral Yoga Institute, USA said in a lecture that religious knowledge should primarily enable people to "search within". Such a process of introspection would make them "selfless". Problems would vanish if people turned selfless and got rid of the feelings of "I" and "Mine". Only those with a pure heart can see God. The Bible and Patanjali reflect these sentiments because "selflessness" is nothing but Karma Yoga. Religion should educate people about the essential truths. Unfortunately, spiritual knowledge cannot be imparted by academic institutions. One can teach arts and science but the "art of knowing" should be secured only through the spiritual institutions. Truth is one but paths to realise it are many and for this, there should be religious unity.

January 27, 1983

The real wealth man should aspire for 25.9

Universal brotherhood is what all religions have been preaching; but, in practice, religion has created walls between man and man. The true spirit of religion is lost on many who call themselves religious. Religion is a transforming experience and it is not just a theory of God. It is spiritual consciousness, insight into reality. Beliefs, rites, ceremonies and dogmas are Subordinate to the spiritual pursuit of self-discovery and contact with the Divine.

It is not mere reading or talking about God that will benefit a person; what is needed, is an earnest attempt to practise the great principles enunciated in the scriptures. To be in communion with God, the inexhaustible storehouse of joy, is the aim of human birth. This is the spiritual wealth man should aspire and work for since it helps him in the life here and the life hereafter. But, to realise God, one needs the guidance of a spiritual teacher (Satguru) one who, himself has had God-realisation. God is not far away. He is omnipresent, pervading every particle of this universe. Man needs only a pointer to reach Him and the spiritual guide acts as the pointer and removes the veil of ignorance that had blocked the vision of the Lord. The Nirankaribaba Sri Hardev Singhji, addressing a spiritual congregation, said that when the individual soul realises the true nature of self and identifies itself with God, the Supreme Father, he wakes up to the reality that he is not different from the other person. Universal brotherhood is no longer a cliche or a platitude, but a fact of life directly experienced. When the individual loses his identity in allpervading God, he inheres the quality of universality. He no longer sees differences based on caste, colour, creed, religion etc. Instead, he loves all humanity.

February 1, 1985

None is beyond redemption 25.10

No one is beyond redemption. The all-merciful Lord is ever ready to forget the wrongs and forgive even the worst sinner. All that is required, is, earnest prayer issuing forth from a remorse-stricken, penitent heart seeking forgiveness, followed by a firm resolve to turn a new leaf. It is open to everyone to make a new start here and now. One has only to seek the Lord's forgiveness entrusting oneself to His loving care in a spirit of self-surrender. "I need you badly to make me a new man" should be the earnest prayer.

We are all children of God, the Supreme Sovereign who rules over the entire universe. A life of joy, happiness, peace and prosperity is everyone's birthright. But, to enjoy the hospitality of that King of Kings, one should make oneself presentable. We should all throw away our old, dirty clothes and wear new ones.

The seeker of the Lord's grace should banish from his mind all base passions and violent emotions like hate, jealousy, anger and lust and develop humane qualities of love, compassion and brotherhood to be extended to all beings including animals and birds. Reverence for life and service to all beings is the highest religion. One has no right to kill an animal. The animal and the bird, all children of God, have got as much right to live as the human being.

Dada J.P. Vaswani, in a lecture, said the lowliest of the low and the most wretched can also hope to rise to great heights of excellence. Each individual is essentially Divine and should have faith in himself. He has to rediscover himself and become aware of the tremendous potential of the higher Self within him. Unfortunately, man identifies himself with the little, tiny ego-self and gives in to selfishness and all

attendant evils. The Lord says in the Gita, "I am seated in the hearts of all". "Man is created in the image of God" so says the Bible. A life of peace and happiness beckons everyone if only he can realise his higher Self and harness the tremendous potential lying hidden in him.

December 26, 1986

Basaveshwara laid stress on equality 25.11

The religious and social conditions which prevailed in India about eight centuries ago demanded the guidance of a bold reformer. Religion at that time ceased to have relevance to the day-to-day living of the common people. Meaningless rituals were rampant. It was in such a society that Basaveshwara was born around 1131 AD in Bijapur district.

His parents belonged to an orthodox Saivite Brahmin family. Even as a boy, he was a rebel and left his home and went to Kudala Sangama at the confluence of the rivers Krishna and Malaprabha. In the hermitage of his spiritual guide, Jataveda Muni, his personality blossomed.

Basaveshwara married the daughter of a Minister under King Bijjala of Kalyana. Starting as a clerk in the service of the King. Basaveshwara rose to the position of the Chief Minister through merit and sincerity. Besides being an able administrator for the welfare of people, he ushered in several religious and social reforms. He proclaimed that God is one. He advised people not to waste money over building temples, but to look within, to find God enshrined in oneself.

Basaveshwara emphasised on right conduct, courtesy to common people and service to the downtrodden. "Do not post-pone living a good life in this world." He recognised dignity

of labour and condemned parasitic existence. "Work is worship; no occupation is high or low; inferior or superior; every job useful to society is entitled to the same respect and regard".

Basaveshwara laid stress on liberty, equality and fraternity. To him all were equal irrespective of caste, creed, sex, occupation and wealth. His lifelong struggle was to eradicate untouchability and inequality of every kind. Though he was the Chief Minister, he not only visited the area inhabited by untouchables but partook food with them. He encouraged intercaste marriage. Jealous of his position, achievements and popularity, orthodox and traditional persons joined together and complained to King Bijjala that he was upsetting the established social order and thereby causing an upheaval in the kingdom. On such pressure, the King wanted to annul intercaste marriage and punish severely the parents of such spouses. Protesting against this unjust decision, Basaveshwara relinquished his office as Chief Minister. He left Kalyana and went to his spiritual mentor who was on his deathbed. Some time thereafter Basaveshwara attained samadhi. His perennial philosophy of life has universal appeal and his teachings are valid even today.

April 20, 1988 *D.M. Chandrasekhar*

To realise soul is purpose of birth 25.12

To be born as a human being is the result of pious deeds carried out over a number of years. Unfortunately once he is conferred with this privilege, man usually runs after worldly affairs - money, getting fame, raising a fine family and enjoying other benefits. But in this process, he fails to understand the very purpose for which God has given him this body. No doubt there is now tremendous technological advancement but these achievements cannot help any one to manufacture

just a drop of blood, which God has created so perfectly. For this, man should be thankful to the Almighty. Saints alone can explain this idea of positive thinking.

Sri Pramukh Swami Maharaj of Swaminarayan Mission in a discourse explained how good acts done by a man make him eligible to tread the path to heaven while misdeeds, push him into the abyss. Even amongst the former, if they are carried out with desires, they will become a "business" and will not fetch liberation from the cycle of rebirths. Material progress alone will not give real happiness or even peace. The happiness a person enjoys in a tasty dish or witnessing a charming person can be attributed to the soul within the body. If this soul goes away from a person, others will hesitate even to utter his name. They will categories it as "dead" and will be anxious to get rid of it at the earliest hour. The man who had loved his wife so much and was deeply attached to her will not want to sit near her, once the "live element" (Atma) has departed. This proves that neither taste, nor looks, nor touch, sound or smell will give pleasure but only the soul inside the human frame. To realise this "Soul" is the purpose of this birth.

In the holy texts, Anjaneya is described as the first among the intellectual astutes because he was able to realise who Lord Rama was. Had he not done so, he would only be an ordinary monkey. He is worshipped as a deity because he turned one of Sri Rama's devotees. God has given us intelligence and that has to be put to use towards doing the good only. Working without worldly desires and acting within the rules framed by scriptures will help man to realise God and secure liberation.

January 4, 1990

Method of developing self-confidence 25.13

The human body can be compared to a temple, with God seated within. Hence all that we do are at His command and we should undertake to carry out only pious deeds which will please Him. Everyone should be treated with utmost kindness. To be born as a human being itself should be considered as a rare privilege conferred by God and hence such a golden opportunity should never be wasted.

Worship of God will naturally provide the solace needed for a tormented soul. Obstacles are also bound to crop when a person is desirous of approaching God but they can be surmounted with self-confidence. Divine service should first be carried out as Anjaneya did, Several guidelines have been provided to lead a virtuous life and these ought to be followed sincerely.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba in a discourse said that people usually seek Divine assistance only when confronted by problems. Development of self confidence will provide a man the strength to face them. It is necessary to equip oneself with spiritual wisdom - not academic or text- book knowledge. The spirit of enquiry should also be cultivated.

Another important injunction that should never be violated is to avoid wastage of food. It is a crime to do so. A tale is familiar about Saint Thiruvalluvar who was in the habit of placing a needle and a cup of water by the side of the leaf in which he used to take his lunch. For a long time, his wife who had faithfully served him did not ask the purpose of these items but the Saint told her that should she on any occasion cause a particle of rice to spill, he wanted to pick it up with the sharp tip of the needle and wash it in the cup but there was no need for it for she was extremely careful and did her job with fervour. The second important

lesson to be learnt is not to waste Time which is precious. The third command relates to spending money. Never should a person throw it away or misuse it just because he has plenty to spare. Desires should be curbed and anger carefully controlled. God is Love and everyone should allot a few minutes daily to retain God's forms in the mind. Our prayers should be "Let the entire humanity be happy. Let us all get salvation."

February 12, 1990

Equality, service were his watchwords 25.14

"God is one; the world is real and a challenge and inspiration. Good deeds are the heaven and evil acts, the hell. The goal of life is to attune oneself to living in communion with the Divine Being, leading a virtuous life in this world and engaging oneself in service to mankind."

These propositions form the quintessence of the philosophy of Basaveshwara, the great social and religious reformer. He was born around 1131 AD at Ingaleshwara Bagewadi in Bijapur district in a traditional Brahmin family. When all was set for his "sacred thread" ceremony at the age of eight, he left his home, severing his relationship with his parents, prompted by an inner urge. He went to Kudala Sangama at the confluence of the Krishna and the Malaprabha, where he met his spiritual guide, Jataveda Muni. After completing his education under his guru, he joined the service of King Bijjala in Kalyan, now in Bidar district of Karnataka. In due course, he became the Chief Minister.

Centuries before the French Revolution, he preached liberty, equality and fraternity. He fought every kind of social inequality. He scorned untouchability and the hierarchical caste system.

He stood for equality of women. Basaveshwara was at the same time a treasure house of devotion. He pointed out that mere learning would not lead to devotion. One should not feel proud of one's learning or other accomplishments.

Basaveshwara touched the hearts of the people because he spoke and wrote in Kannada and his sayings were in simple verse called, "vachanas". Basaveshwara blessed a historic marriage between the daughter of Madhuvarasa, formerly a brahmin, and the son of Haralayya , an untouchable, who had become a devotee. The vicious who were jealous of Basaveshwara's ascendancy carried tales to King Bijjala who gave in to their pressure and ordered the torture of Haralayya and Madhuvarasa. This shocked the sensitive Basaveshwara as violence in any form was repugnant to him. He took upon himself the blame for not being able to convince the King, left Kalyan for Kudala Sangama where he attained union with Kudalasangameshwara in 1167.

April 24, 1993 *D.M. Chandrasekhar*

Attachment is the seed of grief 25.15

If a person is asked what is dear to him, he may enumerate a number of things. But he may not realise that those articles which he holds close to him, are but pegs which constrain him to weep. If what he considers precious vanishes before he dies, he will regret for the loss; if he dies first, he will weep for having to part with it. Attachment is the seed of grief. There will be no cause for any sorrow if there is no forcible parting between the person and objects he cherishes. He can however give them up by renouncing.

Forceful separation always brings tears. If an unripe mango is removed from its stalk, there will be 'weeping at

the point where it was plucked. But a fully ripe fruit will drop down of its own. Likewise, a man bogged in family ties, will feel unhappy but an enlightened soul with a mature mind will remain detached, giving up all worldly desires. He will enjoy peace whereas for the other type of men, life will be bitter and sour.

Aspirants should convert their powers of thought, speech and action into a currency which will be accepted throughout the universe. Their currency of 'Virtue or Righteousness' (Dharma) which bear the impress of God will be a legal tender throughout the world. It should be an asset which people would have earned by the virtuous deeds done. Of the three - body, wealth and the mind - the second cannot be taken across the shores of death. Thoughts, speeches and actions should secure them a safe passage to the realm beyond.

It is easy to chant God's names, detaching oneself from the worldly activities and clinging to God's holy feet, said Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi of Kanchi in a message. Man's prayers to the Lord with contrition and humility should be: "We possess no virtue which will make us deserve Your grace. Take us under your protection."

The material goods which have been secured will not follow anyone after death. The good and evil which one has thought, spoken or done will be the merits and demerits which will accompany one. The 'merit' is the genuine currency of the spiritual kingdom and to enjoy bliss. The evil will get transformed as illegal currency of the nether world and will meet with punishment due. In the journey from here to another world, no one can carry anything however much one may wish to do so. Everything should be left behind. But it is open to a person to convert all the material wealth into spiritual wealth that will be current in the kingdom of God.

November 10, 1993

Piety can help achieve perfection 25.16

Among the four types of God's creations -- celestials, human beings, animals and planets, the second, viz. life as man provides full scope for the development of an integrated personality. He can achieve perfection if he zealously upholds the Code of conduct, keep his hearts cleansed, retaining only pious thoughts and behave good. Contrary to the instructions prescribed, man violates the rules and rejects them which were given to him to lead a life of purity. How then to become an ideal man, making earthly existence pleasant. The Ramayana fulfills this need.

The story of the Lord who came to the world as an ordinary man imparts directives in every aspect of life. The epic serves as a mirror reflecting man's tribulations and aspirations. It is a narration of a common man's own life. The hero subjects himself to turmoils but never swerves from the Divine path of Righteousness. The Ramayana has been told to us times without number and the message from it in a nutshell is 'Become a man first, be a Rama, then you are close to God'. How He went through various types of challenges is narrated in the story, full of tenderest pathos and the most moving emotions.

The purpose of His incarnation was to demonstrate how man should behave. His amiable qualities, upright behaviour and respect for cherished values enable the epic's readers to emulate Him and become chastened, anchoring their own lives in righteousness. Rama indeed beckons mortals to study His character and shape their lives in accordance with the examples set by Him.

In his discourse, Sri Chinna Sriman Narayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami said, the kingdom where He resides is pure, His attendants ever at His service. God needs no assistance

from anyone to carry out His wishes. He can act at His freewill. He is not affected by the blemishes found in the world when He is here nor is He dependent on any other person.

Unlike men who take birth because of the consequences of their past deeds, God comes here not due to any such act but as and when likes. He can select as who should be His parents in the world. While playing the role in His manifestation, He retains all His powers. As Rama, He revealed that He is the reservoir of all auspicious qualities. The epic is an ocean lending opportunity to readers to dive deep and recover any amount of pearls in the form of teachings and morals. The directives to mankind on how to behave and lead a life of divinity have been given in capsules. All that a person who desires to reach the goal should do, is to tread on His footsteps.

July 6, 1994

God's existence has to be intuited 25.17

Is it imperative on our part to worship God and believe in His presence? This question has been raised by some and their main argument is that birds and animals which have no knowledge of this supreme force, perform all actions which men carry out. This statement of some skeptics has been effectively countered by God-centred men that wisdom and the power of speech are the privileges which have been bestowed only on human beings, thereby distinguishing them from other creations. How did they come to acquire these traits and who grants the same to them? These faculties of men are neither meant for mere competition nor selfish gains nor deceiving others. They are intended to be properly used to realise the goal - the eternal Reality.

The ignorant place their reliance on perishable beings and thus get deprived of God's grace. When Divine traditions are not followed or neglected, human life becomes inferior to that of animals inducing them to commit violence out of fear as well as to sustain the body and other necessities. Those who think that worship of God is unnecessary ask whether the God they adore will fulfill a man's needs when he does not earn his livelihood. Why not the same God protect humanity from calamities? The advocates of such views superficially appear to be justified but delving deep into our scriptural heritage it will be easy to see that living in this world alone is not that important but it is our duty to get released from bondage. Worldly activities will not fetch Bliss and hence men cannot depend on them for long.

One can see how even carefully performed duties often produce opposite results and identical types of works bear dissimilar fruits. Without belief in the will of God, phenomenal variations in nature cannot be explained. Man entertains negative thoughts and becomes bankrupt when Divine culture and traditions are neglected. For its very existence, creation depends totally on the creator, said Sri B.V. Paramahamsa Maharaj in a discourse.

The universe is a creation of God who transcends limitations of time and space. His existence therefore cannot be questioned. From microcosm to macrocosm, there is an order that is beyond human imagination. The tiny brain of a human carries out unbelievable functions. Precise are the components of the solar and stellar bodies. Are not these proofs enough to claim that they are the works of an unseen supreme authority -- God? It is hence necessary to have total faith in the Lord. When man gets enmeshed in pleasures, his faith gets distracted towards money and property. But when directed towards God, faith takes him towards the goal.

September 1, 1995

Divinity should be the goal of life 25.18

While describing the goal of human beings, many philosophers often refer it to the sea water, which due to the Sun's powerful heat from its rays, gets evaporated and becomes clouds. Travelling over a long distance in the sky, they get transformed into pure water and empty then on mountains, forests and rivers. The water of these rivers go back to the sea. In the same way, a human being gets seperated from God and takes birth as a man or a woman. After going through rebirths several times, he or she finally goes back to God, from where the journey originated.

This example may not be completely applicable because the whole quantity of water does not reach the ocean, as it also caters to the needs of mankind, to agricultural crops and for sustaining the trees. Only after serving the world in ways more than one, that the amount left over goes to the sea. Likewise, man should live a worthy life by making himself useful to society. One who leads a selfish life can never reach God after his death. Re-birth is certain for him. He should realise that God Himself came to the earth as a human in order to serve society. Even as a bulb is needed to feel the presence of electricity that passes through the wire, Divine power can be revealed only through a human being. God incarnates to make everyone know as how valuable and sacred is human life.

Scientists say that there is no further evolution after human birth. But our sages had advocated the theory that there was a further process. viz. from Humanity to Divinity. The goal of life is thus to reach that Divinity. The body of a man is a temple and the heart, the pedestal of God. If this is understood, the body cannot but be kept pure. In spiritual practices, internal cleanliness gets priority over the

external. Unity and purity of thought, word and deed should be maintained. The sages have said that the world is the manifestation of God and that He exists everywhere. In Bhagavad Gita, God has declared that He would stay in all the elements and in the hearts of all beings. Divine power is there in every living object even as it exists in the minute atom also.

In a lecture, Sri Viswayogi Viswamji (Guntur) said, to be born as a human being is in itself a rare gift of Providence, which cannot be obtained easily. Hence everyone should endeavour to make it purposeful and fruitful and strive hard to become perfect, then prudent, then a realised soul and finally identify himself with the Supreme. "Why was I born," should be his main question and he should ponder how others are benefited by him.

December 4, 1995

Charity helps to mitigate difficulties 25.19

Among all worldly objects, money is perhaps extremely valued by almost every man. It is his tendency to try his utmost to accumulate wealth and he then buys comforts and pleasures with the money so obtained. He also experiences a sense of pleasure on having amassed wealth. But if by misfortune, he is deprived of it he feels an inexplicable agony for having lost it. Thus while possession of money may give a kind of mental satisfaction, losing it in some manner will subject him to grief.

In order to enable such people to retrace their steps and spend the money in a purposeful way, scriptural texts have prescribed certain "acts of atonement". Sages and saints who had palced before man several methods to reform

themselves had based the same on their previous lives deeds. These steps of atonement include chanting certain mantras, religious rites, worship and charity. Among them the last has been given priority. The idea behind the acts of giving charity is to help a person to mitigate the rigours of difficulties which confront him such as fear of illness, domestic quarrels, and loss in business. By giving a part of his wealth by way of donation, a person may go through certain amount of pain (because of the loss in his total accumulation) but he would be setting off a portion of his sins. It is like channels in an uncontrollable river and diverting the waters to agricultural operations, said Sri Ganapathi Satchidananda Swami in a lecture.

The act of philanthropy will naturally result in a sense of agony to the donor, but will produce happiness in the mind of the receiver, which will create in turn positive and favourable vibrations in the Divine energies which are responsible to enable one to get over the results of his past deeds. The scriptures have laid down various types of charity which give different degrees of happiness even as in the case of receiving a gift of a bag of rice or a gold coin. But the tendency among some who adopt this method of propitiation of sins is to give away something which is not of much value or which is of no use to them. Some try to promise but are reluctant to give away an article. Such an attitude will not help a giver because the vibrations produced are negative in nature. Hence only useful and precious gifts should be donated. A verse says "Even if you give a small donation, if you do so with due respect, it will result in immense good. It is the happiness (generated by positive vibrations) in the heart of the recipient that is significant and not the article he has been handed over."

November 7, 1996

Temples serve as spiritual centres 25.20

Temples are the abodes of God and serve as centres for spiritual practice. The idols installed therein have been duly sanctified by religious leaders and have acquired vibrant energy. The forms of the images carved out of stone or moulded in metal are based on description about Gods contained in scriptures or prescribed by saintly men who have been privileged to get His vision. Visit to the temples will purify the mind and expand one's spiritual awareness. In some cases, the idols have sprung out of their own accord because of Divine mercy while some have been enshrined by sages while some by devotees.

Though the country abounds in temples, some among them have acquired extraordinary fame. One is in Udupi on the west coast where the Balakrishna image attracts thousands of devotees. The idol is unique in that it was installed in the 13th century by Sri Madhwacharya, one of the three religious reformers. The greatness of the place has been explained by Vadiraja Swami in his Theertha Prabhanda, a travelogue.

How Sri Madhwacharya obtained the idol of Balakrishna has a suprising background. He was meditating near the sea shore at Malpe on the west coast when he noticed a ship caught amidst the rough sea in distress. By waving his saffron-coloured robe, he was able to bring it safely to the shore. Grateful for having saved the vessel and the crew, the Captain of the ship requested him to choose whatever he liked from the ship as a compliment. The Acharya wanted only a dried heap of sandal paste, which he knew by his insight, contained an idol of Balakrishna. He carried it to Udupi singing the popular Dwadasa Stotra. The idol itself is believed to have been worshipped by Rukmini. When Dwaraka was submerged, the idol got covered by the sandal paste, only to be retrieved by the saint.

Sri Madhwa entrusted the responsibility of uninterrupted worship of the idol of Balakrishna in the Udupi temple to the heads of eight Maths founded by him, each for two months. This period of the temple's administration and worship was changed to two-years by Sri Vadiraja of Sode Math. To give darshan to Kanakadasa, a great devotee, the idol turned westward.

Sri Vidyavarinidhi Thirtha Swami, senior head of the Kaniyoor Math (one of the eight) explained in a lecture how daunting and challenging the tenure of the Paryaya was, but added that when one actually assumed charged of the assignment, the period of two years passed off without any difficulty as it had been the case over the past seven centuries.

March 20, 1997

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